

JANUARY

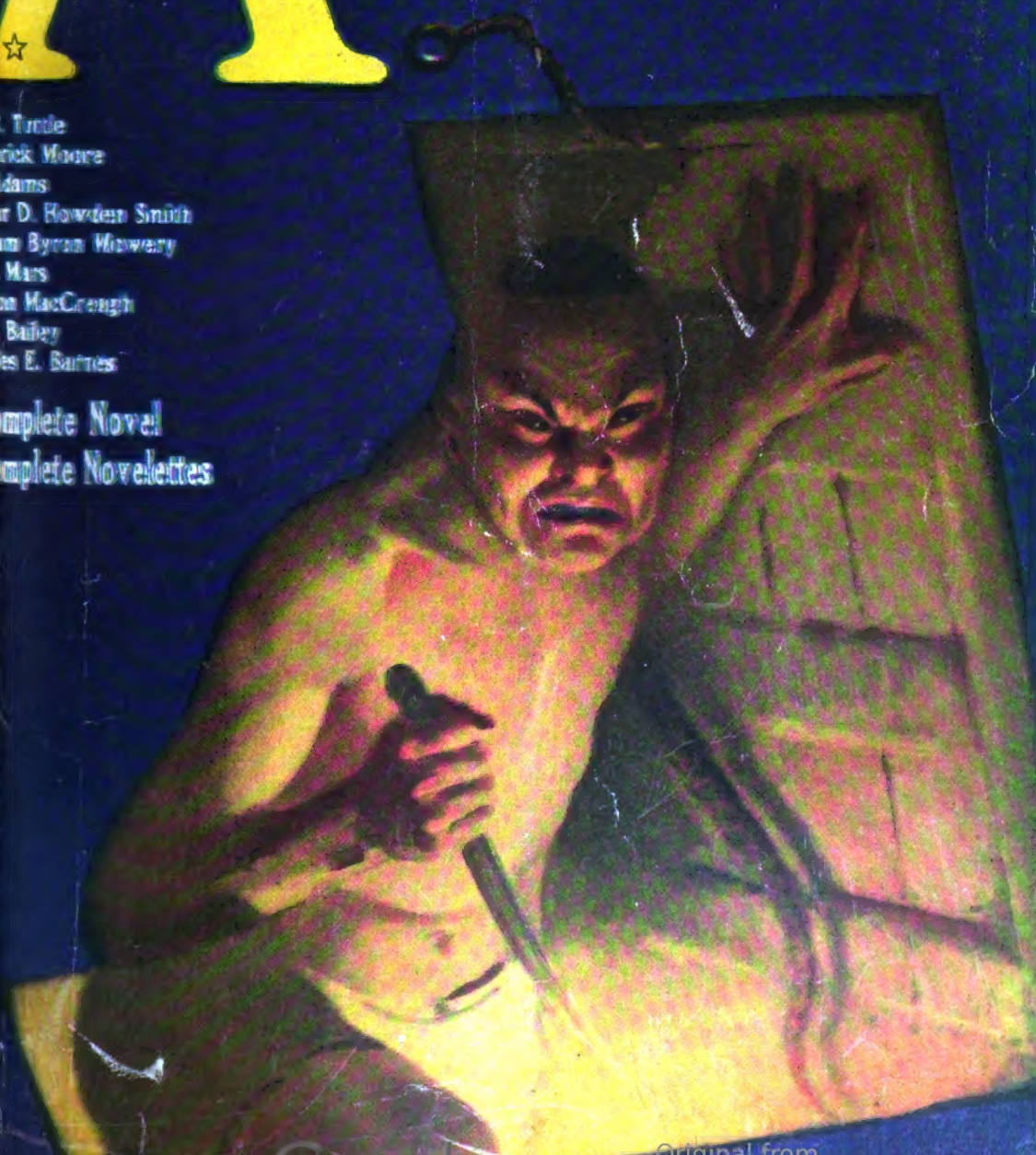
PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



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Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

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Spring and Macdougall Streets - - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the
Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, \$6.00 in Advance

Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign Postage, \$3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered: Copyright, 1924, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at
Stationers' Hall, London, England.

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*Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

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Three Complete Novelettes

IN 1864 Fort Critten in Arizona, a Federal outpost, was in an uproar. The commanding officer had been found dead—murdered by an unknown hand—and suspicion pointed to *Ralph Mason*, the captain of a band of scouts. Aided by his men he escaped in the night to the wilderness, only to find the Indians had risen, a ranch-house in ruins, and a woman abducted. There they took up the long trail that led to vengeance. “**THE GALVANIZED CAPTAIN**,” a complete novel by George Brydges Rodney in the next issue.

IT WAS an A-number-one location and three men wanted it—*Dad Roundwell*, who said it was “the purtiest land God ever left out in the sunshine!”, *Smoot*, who planned to build an illicit still there, and *Potter*, the Moral Owner. *Roundwell* beat the others to the land office and filed his claim, but he still had to contend with *Smoot* and *Potter*. “**LAND LOVE**,” a complete novelette by Barry Scobee in the next issue.

HARGRAVES was a powerful man—big everywhere, except upward. He called swearing a sin and drinking a crime and wouldn't let his shipmates do either. But he overreached himself when he tried to convert a tribe of savages whose chief was a degenerate white man. “**THE DESERTERS**,” a complete novelette by J. D. Newsom in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure is out on the 10th, 20th and last day of each month

Adventure

FEB 29-1924
VOL. XIV
NO 3



HASHKNIFE and the FANTOM RIDERS

A Complete Novelette
by W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Blind Trails," "The Loom of Lies," etc.

A COLD drizzle of fog and rain was sweeping in from the ocean, almost obliterating the guttering arc-lights along the street. Far away sounded the clanking rattle of a cable-car, screeching around the sharp turns. An iron-tired vehicle rattled over the cobble-stones, and from far down the harbor sounded the harsh notes of a fog-horn.

At the front door of an old-fashioned residence, which had been a magnificent edifice in its time, stood two men, hump-shouldered in the dripping rain. It was impossible, in that light, to describe their appearance, except that one was tall and the other very profane.

The tall one, ignoring the call-button, hammered on the door with his knuckles. They listened for a few moments, and then the smaller one cleared his throat harshly.

"Aw, to — with this country!"

"Raise yuh a stack of blues," said the tall one dryly.

"'F I ever get out of here—say, 'Hashknife,' are yuh sure this is the place?"

The tall one hammered on the door again, before he said—

"I betcha it is, Sleepy; but the house is so danged big they can't hear m' knock."

As he started to knock again the door opened softly and a butler, of very dignified appearance, squinted closely at them.

"Is this him?" queried the smaller of the two men, but the tall one ignored the question and spoke directly to the butler.

"I been hammerin' on the door for ten minutes."

"Pardon me, but you should have rung, sir."

"Yeah?" The tall man grinned widely. "Well, I might 'a' whistled, but I'll be danged if I ever carried a bell. Is Mr. William Lanpher to home?"

"Yes, sir. Are you Mr. Hartley?"

"M' name's Hartley, yessir."

"Mr. Lanpher is expecting you, sir. He will see you in the library."

"My gosh!" exploded the smaller man, "I hope he don't ask me to read. You go ahead, Hashknife, and I'll guard the rear."

Together they followed the butler into the richly furnished home, where their soggy, high-heeled boots made no sound in the heavy carpets, and into a high-ceiled,

homey-looking room, where a log fire crackled in the big fireplace.

"May I take your hats?" asked the butler.

"No, never mind," grinned Hashknife Hartley. "If we stay long, I reckon we can hang 'em up ourselves. Did yuh say he was lookin' for us?"

"Mr. Lanpher will be down in a moment," assured the butler, as he silently withdrew.

The tall man rubbed his big hands together and went to the fireplace, the water still dripping from his wide sombrero. The other man looked around the room, taking in all the details before joining the tall man at the fire, where they stood with their backs to the grateful heat and took stock of the place.

"What do yuh reckon he wants, Hashknife?" asked the smaller man softly.

"I dunno, 'Sleepy.' You seen the letter he sent to us at Phoenix. The secretary of the Cattle Association said that he knowed Lanpher and that he was all right. Danged if I'd 'a' ever come to Frisco if I knowed it was so cold here. Rather face a Dakota blizzard than that danged fog."

"Lanpher must have money," observed Sleepy Stevens. "'F I had money I'd live in the sunshine, y'betcha. I'm wet plumb through. Listen to this—"

Sleepy extended a soggy boot and worked his toes.

"Hear her squirsh?"

Hashknife grinned softly, which almost concealed his eyes in a mass of wrinkles. His face was thin and bony—almost sad in repose, and bronzed to the texture of leather from facing the weather of the wide places.

His arms were long and ended in a pair of muscular hands, which seemed to be always in his way. Sleepy Stevens was shorter, heavier built, with a deeply-lined face, a calculating pair of blue eyes, and hair which might be designated as a roan color.

Their garb and actions showed plainly that they were from the cattle country, although they were wearing "store" clothes, except for their boots and hats.

"Yeah, I'll admit that yore feet are wet," smiled Hashknife, "but you ain't got nothin' on me, cowboy. I'll bet yuh even money that I've got more water in my boots than you have, and settle it right here."

"Feller, you've done made a bet!" snorted Sleepy, and sat down on the floor, tugging at his boot.

Hashknife leaned against the mantel, hooked the heel of one boot over the toe of the other and began to remove his boot, when William Lanpher came into the room.

So engrossed were the two cowboys that they did not see him until he said—

"Perhaps I can find some dry foot-gear for you."

"Huh!" Hashknife stopped and stared at him. "Howdy. Say, you can referee this bet."

"Bet?" Lanpher stared at them. "I do not understand."

William Lanpher was a medium-sized man, of about fifty years of age, rather fleshy, round-faced and well-dressed. The cities are full of William Lanphers.

"Well," Hashknife grinned softly and looked at his partner, "I reckon we was a little hasty. I bet Sleepy that my feet were wetter than his, but I plumb forgot to state the size of m' bet."

"Write yore bet, cowboy!" snorted Sleepy. "I've got half of it up to m' hip right now, but I'll almost give yuh odds on what's left in m' boot."

Hashknife worked his foot back into his boot, and Sleepy, seeing that the bet was all off, swore softly and scuffed his foot on an expensive Oriental rug, trying to force the boot back on to his foot.

"You are Mr. Hartley," said William Lanpher, "and I have been expecting you."

"I betcha," nodded Hashknife. "But yore front door is so thick that m' knock never got through it."

"I wrote to the Cattlemen's Association," said Lanpher slowly. "I wanted the best man they could recommend."

"You got both of 'em, mister," Sleepy grinned and felt of his toes.

"I only asked for one," smiled Lanpher.

"The good ones comes in sets of twos," said Sleepy seriously.

"The letter was sent to us at Phoenix," said Hashknife. "I know Bill Wheaton, the secretary, real well, and he said he knowed you. We had a — of a time findin' this house."

"Me and Sleepy got on one of them danged street-cars that goes —ity-blip-pin' along, and we hit a curve and Sleepy fell off and —"

"Fell off!" snorted Sleepy. "I got bucked off, yuh mean. The conductor yelped, 'Look out fer the curve!' But he yelped after I was reachin' for the saddle-horn."

"And I got off to pick up the remains, and the danged car went away without us. Sleepy said he'd be darned if he'd ride another one; so we walked."

"We waded," corrected Sleepy.

Lanpher laughed and drew some chairs up to the fire, after which he offered them cigars, but they declined in favor of their own home-rolled cigarettes. Lanpher, once he got settled in his chair, lost no time in coming down to his reasons for sending for them.

"I own a half-interest in the Circle Cross cattle outfit in the Ghost Hills Range. Know where it is?"

"I know where it's located," nodded Hashknife, "but we ain't never been there. I've heard of the Circle Cross outfit."

"I wish I never had," said Lanpher bitterly. "It has already cost me a fortune in money, and," he hesitated, "has cost me more than mere money could replace."

"Cow ranches are expensive sometimes," agreed Sleepy interestedly.

"What seemed to be the real trouble with the Circle Cross?" queried Hashknife, stretching his long legs out to the fire and rolling another cigaret.

Lanpher tossed his cigar into the flames and leaned back in his chair.

"Three years ago," he began, "Jim Trainor and I bought the Circle Cross. Trainor knew the cattle business—I had the money. It was sort of a case of him putting his experience against my cash."

"We bought stock from all over Wyoming, and I will assure you that the outlay of gold was considerable. I knew nothing about the business, but I knew that Jim did. In fact, I know nothing about it now, except that—well, my experience was not exactly pleasant."

"One year ago, or about that length of time, the Circle Cross cattle began to disappear. Perhaps it was longer ago than that, but no matter. A roundup proved that we had lost a small fortune in cattle."

"Jim started an investigation, but was unable to arrive at any conclusion. But it served to increase his vigilance and he found that stock was disappearing with startling regularity."

"Some smart rustlers cleanin' yuh out, eh?" smiled Sleepy. "They will do things like that, Mr. Lanpher."

"So we discovered," said Lanpher dryly. "After our own investigations failed, we

called upon the Cattlemen's Association, and they sent an operative. He worked as a cowboy upon the Circle Cross, but was unable to solve the mystery.

"He was taken off the job and another man put on. This man was shot and killed a week after he went into the Ghost Hills country. He was found, riddled with bullets, lying in a corral just outside the town of Wolf Wells."

"There was no clew to his death. Another detective was sent in to take his place."

Lanpher paused to light a cigar and Hashknife snuggled deeper into his big chair.

"Does it interest you?" asked Lanpher.

"We ain't made no move to walk out," grinned Hashknife. "Keep her spinnin', pardner."

Lanpher nodded slowly and squinted into the fire.

"I'm no story teller, Hartley. This might be embellished quite a lot, but I haven't the ability to use words. That detective was there ten days when he was killed—shot."

"One detective was taken off the job and the next two were killed, eh?" mused Hashknife thoughtfully. "Two out of three is a pretty good average. Was you there, Lanpher?"

"No. This last killing was done a month ago. It seemed a foolish thing to ask the association to send in another man; so I corresponded with Mr. Wheaton. He advised me to get in touch with you."

"Did the sheriff arrest anybody?" queried Sleepy. "They mostly always does arrest somebody."

Lanpher threw his cigar into the fire and leaned forward, elbows on knees, squinting thoughtfully, as if trying to frame a reply. Then he nodded slowly, seriously.

"Yes, they arrested old 'Pinto' Cassidy."

Lanpher shut his jaws tightly and got to his feet. He seemed to be laboring under a strain, as he paced half the length of the room before turning back to them. Hashknife and Sleepy waited for him to resume.

"And that is the part of the whole thing that hurts," he said slowly. "Cassidy is a squawman. His wife is a Sioux squaw. He owns the Tomahawk outfit. — knows, he had enough Indian about his place, without using a tomahawk for a brand."

"You know him very well?" asked Hashknife.

Lanpher ignored the question.

"Cassidy had forbidden any of the Circle Cross outfit to come on to the Tomahawk ranch. This detective was working on the Circle Cross, and he was found dead within quarter of a mile of the Tomahawk ranch-house. He was on Cassidy's ranch.

"But it is doubtful whether they can convict him, and if they do, it will not bring our cattle back. I do not think that Cassidy is the rustler. It is not a one-man job, Hartley, and requires more brains than any squawman has. In fact, we haven't the slightest idea where the stock has gone. That will be your job—to find out."

"And duck bullets," added Hashknife grinning. "You ask quite a lot, mister man. But you ain't told us everythin'. What is yore big interest in Cassidy?"

"Interest!" Lanpher fairly spat the word, as he reached into a pocket and drew out an envelope.

For a moment he hesitated, but drew out the letter and handed it to Hashknife.

"I think that will explain it to you," he said evenly.

The letter was post-dated at Wolf Wells, and read:

Dad, you might as well save your breath and make the best of things. Regardless of what you say or do, I am going to stick with Cassidy. And what is more, I am going to marry Lorna one of these days. I haven't seen any of the boys of the Circle Cross for quite a while.

I suppose I am to be classed with Cassidy's alleged bunch of rustlers, as you intimated in your letter. Well, all right, I don't mind. This is a wide, wide world and I am twenty-one.

Your affectionate son,
BEN.

Hashknife folded up the letter and handed it back to Lanpher.

"Do you understand what it means?" queried Lanpher hoarsely.

"Who's Lorna?"

"Cassidy's daughter—a half-breed."

"Well," Hashknife frowned for a moment and looked up at Lanpher with a quizzical smile.

"She ain't never scalped anybody, has she?"

"Scalped?" Lanpher stared at Hashknife. "Why—uh—does this appear as something—er—funny?"

Lanpher's face was red with indignation.

"Not exactly funny," agreed Hashknife, serious again. "But I don't see where you

ought to chaw up yore own shirt over it, Lanpher."

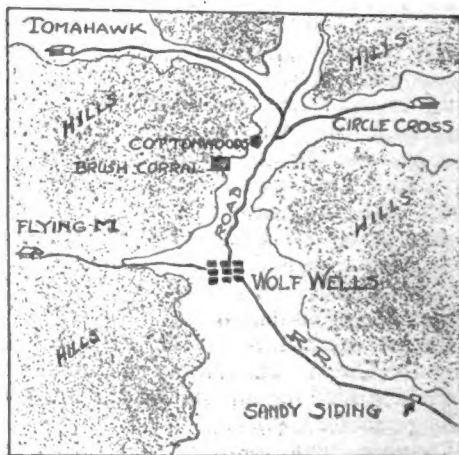
"You don't? Do you think I want my son to marry an Indian?"

"She's only half-Indian."

"All right, half-Indian! I don't want her!"

"Well! You ain't gettin' her, are yuh?" blurted Sleepy. "He said it was a wide, wide world and——"

"Wide world, fiddlesticks! He talks big, because he thinks he's a man. Bennie



wants to pose. A martyred son, and all that kind of rubbish. Marry that — Indian? I guess not."

"Pardner, yo're doin' a lot of guessin'," smiled Hashknife. "This here love thing is a funny old bug. Ain't nobody ever found a cure for it. And as far as the Injun girl is concerned, she's half-American."

"Her father is Irish as Paddy's pig!"

"Her mother is American," reminded Hashknife softly.

Lanpher scowled into the fire and nodded slowly.

"That's true."

Hashknife yawned and got to his feet.

"Well, Sleepy, I reckon we better be goin'."

"Yeah," agreed Sleepy sourly, "we'll be wadin' back down the hill."

"But we haven't come to any agreement," protested Lanpher. "You'll take the job, won't you?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"I don't think so. It ain't noways a healthy place to horn into, and if three cattle detectives have failed, I don't see where two ordinary punchers stand a chance."

"Afraid?" Lanpher's voice was slightly contemptuous.

"Very likely," agreed Hashknife dryly.

"And Wheaton said you had the nerve of the —. I'll show you his letter."

"But he neglected to say that we also placed quite a value on our own heads," grinned Hashknife. "Still, it might not be as bad as it looks, Sleepy. Yo're always honin' for action, cowboy; suppose we take this job."

"Then don't blame me if we both get killed, Hashknife."

"That's fine!" applauded Lanpher. "I'll pay you one thousand dollars apiece to tackle the job. If you show me where our cattle have gone, I'll double it. I don't know you, but Wheaton said you were the only one——"

"I'm goin' to whip Bill Wheaton for lyin' about me," interrupted Hashknife. "There's two liars in Arizona, and Bill Wheaton is both of them."

Lanpher laughed as he crossed to a table and wrote two checks.

"That will be the best money I ever spent, I think," he remarked, as he handed them to the two cowboys.

"We'll use the word 'most,'" grinned Sleepy, squinting at the check. It was the biggest check he had ever seen.

"Pay to the order of Sleepy Stevens, one thousand dollars. Holy henhawks! I betcha I won't sleep a wink."

"Now, don't go and spend it foolishly," laughed Lanpher.

"Nossir." Sleepy folded it and shoved it deep in his pocket. "That stays right in the old poke until I can find a place where they sell rubber-boots."

They were laughing when the butler came in, apologetic for the intrusion, and spoke a man's name to Lanpher.

"Tell him I'll be out in a moment, Parker."

"Well, we'll be movin'," said Hashknife, picking up his hat. "T'morrow we'll head for the Ghost Hills, Lanpher."

"Fine. I'll wire Trainor tonight and tell him to——"

"Nope." Hashknife stopped him. "You lay off that stuff. Me and you and Sleepy are the only ones that need to know. There's a danged smooth gang in there, Lanpher. Remember, they spotted them detectives."

"Well, that's true, Hartley."

Lanpher shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead and do it in your own way."

He led the way out of the room, and as they neared the front door, a man stepped over and spoke to Lanpher. He was a well-dressed, thin-featured man, slightly gray at the temples and with a trifle of a limp in his right leg.

"Good evening, Mr. Lanpher," he said, and nodded to the two cowboys.

"Hello, Carsten," Lanpher held out his hand cordially, and then introduced Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Mr. Carsten is a cattle-buyer," he explained.

Hashknife nodded and held out his hand to Lanpher, just as the front door opened and in came two richly dressed women. One of them was a slender, imperious-looking young lady, and the other a middle-aged woman, rather fleshily built.

Carsten spoke cordially to both of them, and Lanpher smilingly said—

"Mrs. and Miss Lanpher, I want you to meet Mr. Hartley and Mr. Stevens."

"And we're sure pleased t' meetcha," grinned Hashknife, shaking hands with both of them, although it was obvious that neither of the ladies cared for the handshaking.

"We're just makin' a short call," explained Hashknife. "Thought we'd kinda wade out to see Lanpher before leavin' town."

No one seemed inclined to pick up the conversation; so Hashknife said—

"We're sure pleased t' meetcha, and if yuh ever drift over into our country, drop in and see us."

The ladies murmured something conventional, but Carsten elevated his eyebrows a trifle, as he said—

"Just where is your country, Hartley?"

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "yuh might say it was anywhere in the Western side of the U. S. A."

"Sort of drifters, eh?"

"Nope."

Hashknife shook his head.

"We travel under our own power, Carsten. Good night, folks."

They went out of the front door and into the fog and rain. The fog-horns were sending out their eerie wailings down on the harbor, and the street lights gleamed dully at close quarters or faded to mere halo-like spots at a few yards distant.

The two cowboys halted on the sidewalk and turned their backs to the drifting elements.

"What do yuh make of it, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy, his teeth chattering in spite of himself.

"I dunno what to make of it, Sleepy; but we've already made two thousand dollars out of it. Here comes one of them rattlety-bump cars, goin' downtown. Do yuh think yuh can ride her on the curves?"

"I'll ride inside and lock m' heels," declared Sleepy. "My gosh, ain't Miss Lanpher a dinger. Whooee! The queen of Sheber never had anythin' on her—except a snake."



IT WAS very hot in the town of Wolf Wells, a huddle of unpainted buildings, strung more or less along a crooked, dusty street. Wolf Wells was strictly a cattle town, where no one seemed inflicted with too much morals, and its temperature was very hot in Summer and below zero in Winter, which probably accounted for the weather-beaten appearance of the whole place.

A branch railroad wound its crooked way through the Ghost Hills to Wolf Wells, but the train service seemed in the hands of the train crews, rather than in any semblance of a schedule. Wolf Wells was the county-seat.

Just now the town was fairly well-filled with people. It was Saturday, which accounted for some of the activity, but the majority of the people were interested in the outcome of Pinto Cassidy's trial for murder.

The jury, a bunch of hard-bitten cattlemen, were still deliberating, after thirty hours of being locked up in a hot jury-room. Near one of the hitch-racks stood Jim Trainor, half-owner of the Circle Cross outfit, talking to "Fat" Fleager, the sheriff.

Trainor was a big man, broad of shoulder and with a face that was as inflexible as a piece of granite. His eyes were gray, like the gray of tempered steel, and his jaw jutted belligerently, as he bit reflectively at his lower lip.

The sheriff was built after the manner of a bed-slat, and from the sadness of his thin face, the bloodhound-like eyes, with their heavy pouches, one might well expect him to be the proprietor of a non-paying undertaking establishment.

Both men were dressed in range clothes, and Fat Fleager seemed to be continually in danger of losing his belt, which hung draped around his narrow hips. The waist-band of his overalls seemed to cause him much concern also, and the arm-holes of his vest continually crawled out over the points of his narrow shoulders.

They were both looking at a young man, dressed in cowboy garb, who crossed the street past them and went into a saloon. He was a slender young man, unshaven, unhandsome, but there was a devil-may-care slouch to his walk and to the angle of his sombrero. He did not look at Trainor and the sheriff.

"There's a — fool that's breedin' a scab for himself," said Trainor, as the young man passed into the saloon.

"Yeah." The sheriff nodded wearily. "I s'pose."

"No brains. Old man's got lots of money. — kid could pick out a society girl for a wife, but he ain't got no brains."

"Lanpher got lots of money?" Indifferently.

"Ought to have."

"Rich kid come to cowland and learned papa's business, eh?" The sheriff actually smiled at his own humor.

"Lanpher ought to come out here and kick the kid back to Frisco," growled Trainor.

"Uh-huh," dubiously. "Mebbe it wouldn't be safe. The kid got drunk last night in the Lily of the Valley saloon, and he backed ag'in' the bar, with a gun in his hand, and recited some startlin' pedigrees. But nobody called him."

"Felt sorry for him, I suppose."

"Thasso?"

The sheriff squinted at Trainor.

"That kid took seven dollars away from Lonesome Hobbs day before yesterday, shootin' with a six-gun. I threw the tincans for 'em m'self. Hobbs ain't so danged amachoor, y'betcha."

"Well, let him go ahead." Trainor shrugged his shoulders, as if to dismiss the subject.

"Oh, he'll go too far, that's a cinch," said the sheriff. "Kids always does. I wish that danged jury would make up their minds pretty soon. There's Cassidy's girl over in front of the hardware store now. I betcha she's lookin' for Ben Lanpher."

Trainor turned and squinted closely at her. She was about average height, with a

thin oval face, as brown as her maternal ancestors, but showing little of the aboriginal blood. Her hair was dark and worn in two heavy braids, but her eyes were blue.

Her calico dress was well-made, even though a trifle gaudy in color, and she walked with the easy grace of a jungle-bred animal.

"Irish and Injun," muttered Trainor. "—, what a combination! A blue-eyed Injun. If she wanted a weapon and you showed her a brick-bat and a scalpin' knife, which would she take?"

"That's a question," grinned the sheriff. "But she's a — pretty girl, jist the same, Trainor."

"Yes, she's — pretty."

"And she'll make a good wife for some man."

"Hm-m-m," mused Trainor. "I reckon she will."

Two cowboys were crossing the street and Trainor turned from looking at Lorna Cassidy to give them a sharp glance.

"Who are those fellers, Fleager?" he asked.

"One feller—the tall one—is named Hartley. I talked with him this mornin' at the feed corral. They rode in last night from the Encinas country."

"Goin' to stay here?"

"Lookin' for jobs, I reckon. The tall feller is a nice spoken sort of a jigger, but he made me feel like he was laughin' at me all the time. There ain't nothin' soft and tender about either of 'em."

"What did he say that made yuh feel he was laughin' at yuh?"

"Oh-h-h, well—nothin' much. He was tellin' about a feller that he knew who was so durned thin that his clothes wouldn't stay on him, and so he wore his union-suit on the outside. He said it sure looked awful, but gave him the full use of his two hands."

The sheriff hitched up his pants and belt and spat reflectively, while a grin flashed across Trainor's thin lips.

"Anyway," declared the sheriff, "I ain't goin' to try it. Mebbe we better go over and see if there's any news from the jury."

As they started across the street, Hashknife and Sleepy came out of the saloon and caught up with them. Hashknife spoke to the sheriff.

"You ain't puttin' on this kind of weather for our benefit, are yuh, pardner?"

"This ain't so hot," said the sheriff.

"No, it ain't exactly hot. I knowed a man once that was so danged thin that——"

"Your name's Hartley, ain't it?" interrupted the sheriff. "Shake hands with Mr. Trainor, of the Circle Cross."

Hashknife shook hands with Trainor and introduced Sleepy to both men.

"You two fellers just driftin' through?" queried Trainor casually.

Hashknife grinned and shook his head.

"Feller asked the same thing about a week ago. No-o-o, I wouldn't say that we're exactly driftin', Mr. Trainor."

"We're kinda lookin' for jobs," declared Sleepy. "We ain't askin' for work—for jobs."

Trainor laughed.

"I'm full-handed right now, or will be, as soon as that jury finds out what they're goin' to do. My foreman is on the jury, yuh see."

"Seems like they was havin' trouble decidin' the case, accordin' to what I can hear," observed Hashknife. "Old man Cassidy ain't very pop'lar, is he?"

"Not very," admitted Trainor. "I reckon they'll cinch him."

The sheriff shook his head and shifted his chew.

"Nossir, I don't think so. 'F they was goin' to cinch him they'd 'a' done it hours ago. Cow-juries don't work that-away."

"They sure don't," grinned Hashknife. "They're just as liable to bring in a verdict of arson ag'in' the judge as to settle the guilt or innocence of old man Cassidy."

"And still they're twelve men, good and true," grunted Trainor.

"Good and true don't mean that they've got any brains."

"Here comes 'Lonesome' Hobbs," said the sheriff, pointing down the street toward a short, fat, bow-legged individual, who was coming toward them as fast as his feet would carry him. As he drew near he removed his hat, exposing an almost totally bald head, which made him look like a very fat and very much overheated baby.

"Juj-jury's made up their dud-danged minds," he panted hoarsely. "Do yuh know where the juj-judge is, Fat?"

"He's over in the Lily of the Valley, I reckon. Better go over and roust him out, Lonesome."

"Uh-huh. I'll git 'm."

Lonesome bow-legged his way across the

street, fanning himself with his hat, while Hashknife and Sleepy followed Trainor and the sheriff down to the dance-hall, which was used as a courtroom.

Lonesome's search for the judge had spread the news that the jury had reached a decision, and the court filled rapidly. Hashknife and Sleepy secured seats near the front of the room.

Seated just beyond them was Lorna Cassidy, and in a few minutes she was joined by a stout, white-haired man, carrying a mass of legal-looking papers.

"That's Mitchell, the Frisco lawyer," whispered a man near Hashknife. "I heard that young Lanpher hired him to defend old man Cassidy. I betcha it cost him some money."

A few minutes later the sheriff came in from the rear of the hall, and with him was Pinto Cassidy, a little, old, wizened character. Cassidy was typically Irish of face, and his steady glance at the audience seemed to carry a fighting challenge to any or all of them.

But his seamed old face softened as he looked at his daughter, and he smiled softly, patting her on the shoulder. They talked together for a moment and then Ben Lanpher came swaggering up the aisle to sit down beside her. He was flushed with drink, arrogant with the feeling that every one was against him, and looked defiantly at every one in the room.

The judge came in and stood beside his desk. He was an old man, white of hair, very dignified. For a moment he looked about the room and rapped sharply on his desk. The buzz of conversation ceased.

"Just to say to you," said the judge clearly, "that the court will brook no demonstration whatever. You will curb your feelings while within these walls."

He turned and sat down as the jury filed in. They were a tired-looking crew of men, stolid, some of them seemingly half-angry. They sat down in the jury-box and looked expectantly at the judge, who said—

"Gentlemen, have you reached a decision?"

A big, raw-boned cowman, the foreman of the jury, got to his feet slowly and faced the judge.

"We have not," he replied evenly, "and we can't. There's a — fool among us that—" He looked meaningfully at a hard-faced, squint-eyed cowboy on the end of the

row—"that ain't got enough brains to grease a needle with. He's held us up for—well, all the time we've been in there, and we ask that you dismiss us."

The squint-eyed cowboy continued to study the opposite wall, paying no attention to the foreman's words. The judge cleared his throat raspingly.

"Then you find it impossible to reach a verdict?"

"Yeah, unless we want to foller that half-witted gopher's ideas and hang old man Cassidy, judge. If it wasn't murder to kill a feller like him, he'd 'a' been dead eleven times right now."

"And that's no — lie," echoed a disgruntled member.

The judge sighed. He had been many years in cow-land and knew there would be no use to reprimand these men for such language in the court-room. They were all on the ragged edge, and the only thing he could do would be to dismiss them, which he did; thanking them for their efforts.

Ben Lanpher got to his feet and spoke directly to the judge:

"What about Cassidy? Does he get off now?"

The judge shook his head.

"No, I am sorry to say that he will have to stand trial before another jury."

"There's a — of a lot of justice in that!" roared Ben angrily. "Eleven of 'em wanted to turn him loose, and just because one man—"

"Hang on to yourself, Lanpher!" snapped the sheriff, taking him by the arm. "You're in a courtroom—not a saloon."

"That's right," gritted the boy. "We might get justice in a saloon, but we can't get it here."

The sheriff turned and looked at the judge questioningly, but the judge shook his head sadly and turned back toward the rear door. The jury had got to their feet, and the sheriff crossed quickly to them and moved in close to the squint-eyed cause of their disgust.

"I'll walk out with yuh," said the sheriff.

"You better walk with him," grunted one of the jury meaningly."

"Yes, and you better stay with him," added Ben Lanpher.

The squint-eyed one glanced at Lanpher and the lines around his mouth twitched sharply, but he did not reply. Hashknife and Sleepy left the courtroom and went

back to the street, where men were discussing the trial.

A cowboy, somewhat the worse for liquor, came up to them.

"Kinda looks like they was goin' to have a hard time convictin' old Cassidy," he observed. "I'll betcha that jury had a —— of a time. But you mark my word, this ain't all settled yet."

"No?" queried Hashknife. "How's that, pardner?"

"Huh! Lemme tell yuh somethin'. That squint-eyed 'Smoky' Cole'll make 'em pay for what they said about him, y'betcha. He's plumb salty, he is. I *sabe* that jasper. Any time yuh think yo're runnin' a blazer on that son-of-a-gun, yo're foolin' yourself, thasall."

"Bad, is he?" queried Hashknife.

"I'll nod when yuh ask me that," grinned the cowboy.

"You knowed him a long time—before he came here?"

The cowboy sobered a trifle and hitched up his belt.

"Tell yuh what I'll do, I'll buy a drink."

"Who does Smoky Cole work for?" asked Sleepy.

"He's foreman of the Circle Cross. Works for Trainor. I'm named Edwards, but folks calls me 'Bility.'"

"Is that yore real name, or is it short for Ability?"

"——, I dunno. Yuh see——"

He grinned and spilled half a sack of tobacco past his cigaret paper.

"Yuh see, I been with the Flyin' M f'r a long time, and one time some fellers was thinkin' about buyin' old man Shappee out. They was arguin' about things, when I comes up to see the old man, and one of 'em says——"

"Is this one of yore assets?"

"And old man Shappee says:

"——, no! That feller is a liability.'"

The cowboy laughed and spilled the rest of his tobacco.

"Do yuh know what it means?" asked Hashknife.

"——, no! And I don't care. Let's go. It got me a name."

They went into the Lily of the Valley, which was the biggest saloon in the town, and found Trainor at the bar, talking with Lonesome Hobbs. The place was fairly well-filled and the games of chance were being well-patronized.

They accepted of Bility's hospitality and while they were drinking, Ben Lanpher came in. He drank two big drinks of raw liquor before he paid any attention to those at the bar. His eyes were red from liquor and his jaw sagged listlessly.

Hashknife studied him closely and decided that Bennie Lanpher had the makings of a bad-man. He had evidently practised with a six-gun until he had an exalted idea of his own ability, and plenty of liquor had made him careless.

Ben turned and looked at Hashknife, who smiled softly. Bennie was in no mood to have any one smile at him, and his weak jaw immediately assumed a belligerent angle.

"See anythin' funny about me?" he grunted.

Hashknife ignored the question and turned back facing the bar. But Ben was not to be denied. Something seemed to tell him that this tall cowpuncher had smiled at him—possibly laughed at him.

He shoved away from the bar and stepped in behind Hashknife.

"See anythin' funny about me?" he asked.

Hashknife turned lazily and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Yeah, I see a lot of funny things about yuh, young feller. If they wasn't also awful sad, I'd laugh like ——"

"Is—that—so?" Lanpher spaced his words widely and his right hand eased back toward his holster.

"In the first place," continued Hashknife, "yo're too young to drink so much liquor. First thing yuh know you'll quit growin' and always look like a half-baked kid. You ain't got brain enough to see that yo're headin' plumb into trouble—mebbe a rope. Them is some of the reasons why I ain't laughin' at yuh."

Lanpher laughed mockingly, loudly and then his teeth fairly snapped. The room had gone quiet and every one had heard what Hashknife had said, although he had spoken quietly.

"Take it kinda easy," advised Hashknife. "I'm a stranger to you and we ain't got no quarrel."

"Backin' up, eh?" snarled Lanpher. "Next time you laugh at a man, you'll find out who he is first."

Lanpher's hand was on the butt of his gun and his body tensed forward, expecting

that Hashknife would accept his challenge. But Hashknife's eyes squinted just past Lanpher's head and his left eyelid drew down quickly in a deliberate wink.

Lanpher's head twisted as quick as a flash; thinking that there was danger right behind him, and before he could turn back Hashknife's left hand had caught him by the right wrist, while Hashknife's open right hand splatted against the side of his jaw, throwing him off his balance and placing him powerless to do anything, except swear.

And Lanpher did plenty of the latter. Hashknife held him helpless, while the crowd moved in close to enjoy the sight.

"Yuh got a lot of things to learn before yuh can be a honest-to-gosh bad-man," explained Hashknife. "And one of 'em is to never turn yore head."

"Lemme go!" wailed Lanpher.

"All right, I'll let yuh go," agreed Hashknife, "but you've got to agree to one thing."

"All right, — yuh. What is it?"

"As soon as yuh get yore balance, we'll both start shootin'."

The crowd behind Lanpher parted with great alacrity.

But Lanpher did not care for the conditions. Hashknife flung him away and Lanpher staggered into a card-table before he regained his balance. Then he went straight out of the door, without looking back.

"That's tamin' 'em," declared Trainor, who had been an interested observer. "It was just what he needed, Hartley. I'll buy a drink."

The crowd went back to their games, but the incident was not forgotten. Hashknife was a stranger, which was worthy of notice in Wolf Wells, where few strangers ever came, and he had demonstrated that he was able to take care of himself in a way that appealed to the range folk.

"I wish I had a job for you fellers," said Trainor, as they leaned on the bar, "but I'm plumb filled up right now."

"We ain't exactly dependent on a job right now," explained Hashknife, "but a feller don't like to go broke before he lands a job. Who'd be a good rancher to see about a job?"

"I dunno. Yuh might see old man Shap-pee. He owns the Flyin' M, but I suppose he's got a full crew."

"How much of a crew do you have, Trainor?"

"I'm only hirin' three men now. Nothin' much to do this time of the year, except to kinda watch the waterholes. We're break-in' a few horses, too. Usually I have five or six men. I had kinda bad luck lately. Mebbe yuh heard about two of my men gettin' shot."

"Got shot?" Hashknife shook his head. "We ain't been here long enough to hear much gossip. Was it for the killin' of one of them that Cassidy is bein' tried?"

"Yeah, the last one. Mebbe he killed the first one, I dunno."

"He don't look like a killer." This from Sleepy.

"No, he don't, but he's meaner than a snake."

"Just in what way?" Hashknife was curious, and Trainor glanced quickly at him.

"Oh, just mean. He said he'd shoot the first Circle Cross man he found on the Tomahawk."

Hashknife grinned.

"He must have a grudge ag'in' yore outfit, Trainor."

Trainor grunted an unintelligible reply and turned as some one called his name. It was an undersized cowboy, with a limp cigaret glued to his protruding underlip.

"You seen Whitey Anderson?" he asked.

"Not today," replied Trainor.

"He was lookin' for yuh about fifteen minutes ago."

"All right, Shorty."

Trainor accepted another drink and left the saloon.

"Who's Anderson?" asked Hashknife of the bartender.

"Depot agent."

 THEY drifted outside and found Lonesome Hobbs sitting on a hitch-rack. How he ever got himself up that high was a mystery, but he was up there. He nodded to Hashknife and Sleepy and slid over to give them room.

"I seen yuh have yore fuss with young Lanpher," he said huskily. "Bub-by gosh, he needed a jolt. How'd yuh ever think up that winkin' idea?"

"Used my head," grinned Hashknife.

"That's it," nodded Lonesome. "Feller's got to use his brains—if he's gug-got any. I can think of the best doggone

schemes, but I forget 'em right when I need 'em bad. Feller told me a good scheme once. Said to step hard on a feller's feet, when yo're fightin' him and he'll fall down. I tried it—once."

"Didn't it work?" asked Sleepy.

"Not fer me, it didn't. I reckon that was only part of the trick; the rest of it was to keep the other feller from knockin' — out of yuh until yuh could fuf-find his feet. Anyway, that's how she 'pears to me."

They were laughing as Trainor came up to the rack and untied his roan horse.

"Goin' home?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah. Wish I had a job for you two. Hope you get one."

"Much obliged," grinned Hashknife. "We'll swindle somebody out of a few month's wages. *Adios.*"

"Seems like a right nice sort of a feller," observed Hashknife, as Trainor rode away.

"Who, Trainor? Best there is, y'betcha. Danged good cowman, top-notch puncher and reliable as —"

"Which is some reliability," agreed Hashknife. "We'd kinda like to work for him."

"Well, I dunno whether I would or not." Lonesome pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I'm kinda superstitious, don'tcha know it? I figgers that things happens three times before they quits. There's been two of the Circle Cross punchers killed lately. They was leaded considerable, too."

"Figgerin' the way I do, there's another one to go. It don't always work out that-away, of course, bub-but I ain't the kind of a jasper that goes dead ag'in' my own bunches."

"Why do yuh reckon they was killed?" queried Sleepy.

"Why." Lonesome leaned his elbows on his knees and shook his head. "I ain't prepared to say."

"Any idea who killed 'em?"

"Well, they're tryin' old Cassidy for the last one."

"Where is Cassidy's ranch?" asked Hashknife.

Lonesome jerked his thumb in a northerly direction.

"Out thataway. Yuh take the main road out there, and a little over two miles she forks, but don't take the right-hand fork, 'cause that goes to the Circle Cross. Keep on goin' about a quarter-mile and take the left-hand road."

"It's about seven miles to the Tomahawk,

and about five to the Circle Cross. I'd keep plumb away from the Tomahawk, if I was you. They ain't a danged bit friendly."

"But Cassidy is where he can't hurt anybody."

"No, he can't, but there's young Lanpher livin' there, and Jimmy Droop-drawers."

Hashknife laughed outright.

"For gosh sake, what a name!"

"He's a half-breed," grinned Lonesome, "and that name fits him like a plaster. Jimmy was absent the day they was passin' around the brains, but he sure can shoot."

"You got kind of a sweet lot of folks around here," observed Hashknife. "Looks to me like Wolf Wells had enough gunmen to hold up the reputation of a bigger place."

"Aw, we ain't botherin' with gunmen." Lonesome spat dryly and shook his head. "We ain't afraid of nothin' we can see, y'betcha. It's the things we can't see that gits under our hides."

"Such as what?" asked Hashknife.

"Cows that evaporate, for instance."

Hashknife and Sleepy looked closely at Lonesome, but his face was deadly serious.

"Well," said Hashknife slowly. "I've heard of evaporated milk. Mebbe that's where it come from, Lonesome."

"Mum-mebbe," dubiously. "Anyway, it ain't a fav'rite subject with me, gents. I reckon I'll be goin' back to the office. You ain't found no jobs yet?"

He almost fell off the hitch-rack, without waiting for an answer, recovered his hat, which rolled under a horse, and bow-legged his way across the street.

Sleepy grinned and looked at Hashknife.

"What do you think of things, Hashknife?"

"Well, it's too danged early in the game to make any remarks, but I'll say there's a lot of folks around here that might start shootin' any time."

"I don't think a lot of old man Lanpher's offspring, but I do like his pardner. Trainor seems like a regular he-man. The sheriff has only one thing to recommend him, and that is the fact he's so danged thin that nobody could hit him with anythin' bigger than a .22 rifle."

"Lonesome Hobbs is all right. Old man Cassidy might 'a' killed that puncher, but I have my doubts. His girl is danged pretty, and William Lanpher might be danged well honored to think that she'd look at his

slack-headed son. . . Outside of that, I'm hungry. Let's go and eat."

"All right," agreed Sleepy. "I kinda feel that we're goin' to like Wolf Wells. It kinda reminds me of the old Willer Crick outfit, Hashknife. Everybody suspicious of everybody else. I sure hope they don't suspicion us."

"They will, if we don't get a job, Sleepy."

As they crossed the street, Ben Lanpher, Cassidy's squaw and Lorna Cassidy were getting into a light wagon. Lanpher saw them, but did not look up as they passed. The girl gave them a keen glance and the two cowboys lifted their hats. As they went into a restaurant, Hashknife looked back and the girl had turned her head and was watching them.

"I hope she knows us next time she sees us," said Sleepy, grinning.

"I hope they all do," replied Hashknife. "I'd hate to be mistaken for some of the boys from the Circle Cross."



THE Tomahawk was a typical squaw-man's ranch. There was little semblance of order in the locations of the ranch-house, barns or corrals, and the buildings looked as if they might collapse in the next breeze.

The weather-beaten ranch-house, a low, rambling affair, was sway-backed from old age and the weight of many snows, and the barn stood, as a cowboy might express it, kinda antegodlin' to everythin'. The corral fences were lopsided and badly in need of repair.

A few mongrel chickens strayed around the littered front yard of the ranch-house, clucking wildly after the winged grasshoppers; a family of magpies chattered in the cottonwoods behind the barn, while down in a corral a hungry calf bawled loudly.

It was the day following the dismissal of the jury. In the long living-room Ben Lanpher humped over in a dilapidated rocking-chair, staring moodily at a crumpled envelope. His hair was matted, his face unshaven and his clothes bore evidence that he had slept in them—and not on a bed.

Lorna Cassidy leaned against the side of the adobe fireplace, looking with troubled eyes at Lanpher, while near her the squat figure of Mrs. Cassidy was seated on a low stool. At the far end of the room, sitting on the floor, with his knees drawn up to his chin, was the half-breed cowboy, known by

the unlovely title of Jimmy Droop-drawers.

Jimmy was a typical half-breed, in which the Indian blood seemed to predominate strongly. His lower lip was thick and pendulous, his eyes mere slits above his high cheek-bones, and his garb, with the exception of his high-heeled boots, badly run-over at the heels, was entirely aboriginal. It was plainly evident that his beaded-blanket pants had not been made by a tailor, because the seat was entirely too commodious—which accounted for his cognomen.

Ben Lanpher crumpled the letter in his hand and got to his feet.

"Well—" He tried to laugh, but it was only a grimace. "Well, that settles the cat-hop, I suppose. The old man has cut off my credit—told me that I could have no more of his money."

He turned his head and looked at Lorna.

"Well, why don't somebody say something? I'm too—— dry even to curse him."

"There is nothing to say," said Lorna softly.

"Ain't there?" Ben laughed hoarsely. "It means that we won't be able to hire a lawyer for the next trial. I'm broke."

"Why need lawyer?" asked Mrs. Cassidy. "My man never kill cowboy. Only one man think so."

"That —— Smoky Cole!" snapped Ben. "I'll fill him so full of holes that he'll——"

"And who will pay for the lawyer to keep you from hanging?" asked Lorna quickly.

"You don't need a lawyer when you kill a man in self-defense."

"Yo' look out," advised Jimmy thickly. "Cole bad man with a gun. Mebbe yo' need doctor—not lawyer."

"Too much talk about kill," said the stolid old squaw, as she slowly filled a pipe with plug tobacco. "No good to talk."

"Tha's jus' right," nodded Jimmy. "Old Minnie know. Big talk, small medicine."

"Who were those two men who passed, when we were ready to leave Wolf Wells yesterday?" asked Lorna.

"Them two?" Ben took a half-filled bottle from his hip pocket and reached for a tin cup on the table.

"I dunno who they are. Couple of smart cowpunchers, I guess."

"Ben, why don't you go back to your home?"

"Huh?"

Ben took the cup away from his lips and stared at her.

"Why don't I go home?"

"Yes—back to your people."

Ben laughed harshly.

"Why should I go back to them?"

"They are your people. You don't belong here. They would be glad to have you come back."

"Whatcha talkin' about, Lorna?"

Lanpher was half-angry, as he got to his feet and walked over to her.

"I told yuh I'd stay here and see that the old man was cleared. Dad wanted me to stay with the Circle Cross, but me and Trainor couldn't get along. He treated me like I was a kid. Told me not to come over here. Said that you was just a — Injun, and that your father would shoot me if I came on the Tomahawk ranch."

Lorna turned and stared out of the window, her lips shut tight, as if to hold back a flood of bitterness. Then—

"Well, I suppose he was right, Ben."

"What do we care?" laughed Ben hoarsely. "If I want to marry an Injun, that's my business, ain't it?"

Lorna shook her head.

"No, you are just foolish, I think. You go back to your people and forget everybody in the Ghost Hills."

"Not by a — sight! When I go back to California—to Frisco, you are going with me, Lorna."

The old squaw took her pipe slowly from her lips and looked up at Ben.

"You are very big — fool, I think," she declared.

"Is that so?"

Ben turned to the old squaw.

"Mebbe you'd have somethin' to say about it?"

She nodded slowly and began puffing on her pipe.

Ben shrugged his shoulders and poured himself another drink. He had imbibed so much liquor during the last two weeks that his system shrieked for more.

"Why don't you quit drinking?" asked Lorna. "When you came here you did not drink."

"Lot of things I didn't do then."

Ben wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and laughed uncertainly, as he looked closely at his almost depleted flask.

"I've got to go to town and get more hooch."

"What will you do when your money is all gone?"

"Do?"

Ben laughed and picked up his hat.

"Rob a bank, I guess. Maybe I'll join the Ghost Hills gang. By — I'll bet they'd take me in."

He turned and walked out of the door, staggering slightly, as he clumped off the porch and headed for the barn. Jimmy, the half-breed, walked to the door where he leaned lazily against the sill, puffing on his cigaret.

The old squaw did not turn her head as Ben went out, but continued to puff at her pipe, while Lorna moved from the fireplace and stood beside the table, her shapely fingers picking at the cloth.

"Just a — Injun," she said softly, sadly. "Just that and nothing more. Am I any different or worse than other girls?"

The squaw knocked the dottle from her pipe and got clumsily to her feet, which were shod in buckskin.

"You good girl, Lorna. Good Injun just as good as white people."

"You — right!" agreed Jimmy from the doorway. "You jus' right, Lorna. To — with Trainor."

Jimmy turned away from the door and came back toward them.

"Ben gone to town," he announced, and added. "Too much whisky no good."

He squatted at the fireplace and started to roll another cigaret, but his trained ears heard a sound outside and he arose swiftly and his hand swung back to jerk his revolver holster into position.

Came the scrape of a footstep on the narrow porch and Jim Trainor's voice called—

"Anybody home?"

"Somebody home," replied Jimmy huskily. He was just a trifle afraid of the big man from the Circle Cross.

Trainor's huge frame fairly blocked the door as he came in from the porch. Lorna looked straight at him, but the old squaw, after the manner of her kind, paid him no heed. Jimmy watched him closely.

"Hello, Lorna," grinned Trainor, "I got to wonderin' how you folks were gettin' along so I came over to see. Where's Ben Lanpher?"

"He go to town," said Jimmy. "Go jus' now."

"Gone down to get drunk again, I suppose."

Trainor sat down in the rocking-chair and threw his hat on the table. He seemed

entirely at home, even though his welcome had not been any too cordial.

"Why do you come here?" asked Lorna.

"Why?" Trainor laughed shortly. "I told you I wanted to see how you were all getting along, Lorna."

"That should not take long to find out, Mr. Trainor."

"No, I guess that's a fact. Too bad about that jury."

"Too — bad," corrected Jimmy, and was immediately sorry he had spoken.

Trainor turned and looked straight at him.

"When I speak to you, I'll call you by name."

Jimmy swallowed with difficulty and sidled toward the door. He was not of a belligerent disposition and he greatly respected Trainor's fighting ability. At the doorway he turned and fired a parting shot.

"Next time jury agree, mebbe. You know what Pinto Cassidy said about Circle Cross men."

And then Jimmy Droop-drawers faded out of sight. Trainor's face went black for a moment, and the ghost of a smile flitted across the old squaw's face, but Trainor passed it off with a laugh.

"I hope they do agree," he laughed, "and I don't think that Pinto Cassidy will be so hasty next time."

"You believe my father killed him?"

Lorna leaned across the table and looked Trainor square in the eyes.

"Well—" Trainor looked away and rubbed his chin with the ball of his right thumb. "Well, I hope not, Lorna. But if he did he was only making good his threat. Ed Meeker had no business coming over here. He knew what Cassidy had said."

"Who killed the other man—Lloyd Hansen? He wasn't found on the Tomahawk."

"I don't know who killed him. But your father ain't accused of that killin'."

"Why was he killed?" demanded Lorna.

"Why?" Trainor shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows. But that does not interest me. Did Ben get a letter from his father lately?"

Lorna turned away from the table and sat down near the old squaw.

"I know nothing about Ben's mail," she replied.

Trainor smiled.

"He's sayin' that he's goin' to marry you, Lorna."

"I have no strings on his tongue," indifferently.

"I thought he was lyin'," smiled Trainor. "His father wrote me that he had sent word to Ben that his money supply was cut off. It's about time, I reckon."

"Ben is a fool," continued Trainor, when Lorna ignored his statement. "His father is wealthy and can give him everything he would want. He can marry a white girl and live in a fine house; so why should he stay around here?"

"And marry a — Injun," added Lorna.

Trainor looked keenly at her. He remembered saying those same words to Ben, and wondered if he had told her.

"Well, you know how city folks look at Indians, Lorna. You don't look like an Injun. If I didn't know different, I'd never know that you had a drop of Indian blood in yuh."

"What have the Indians ever done to make a white man look down upon their blood?" asked Lorna hoarsely. "They only fought for what had belonged to them for many years. It was not that they wanted to win more, but to keep what they already owned."

"I know. I have read history in school. I have read many tales of the Indian—written by men who knew only the one half of the tale—the white half. The Indian fought in his own way—the only way he knew."

"The Indian was lazy, because that was his disposition, but the squaw was not lazy. And the Indian was honest and sober until the white man—that superior race—came to ruin his morals and soul. He taught the Indian to lie, steal and drink. Perhaps—" Lorna turned away scornfully—"it will take many more years to bring the Indian up to the standard which the white man started to teach him many years ago."

Trainor laughed loudly and slapped his thigh.

"Lorna, when you turn loose, I wonder if you've got any white blood in yuh."

"I am never ashamed of Indian blood," she retorted, "but there are times when I am ashamed of my white blood."

"All right," grinned Trainor. "I don't blame yuh. Let's drop the subject. I never like to argue with a lady."

"Bad business," grunted the old squaw.

"That's right, Minnie," agreed Trainor, laughing. "Anyway, I like Lorna too well to argue with her."

He got to his feet and picked up his hat. "I'm going to run in real often," he stated. "Cassidy won't get another trial before the next term of court, and that'll be three months from now. You'll probably be needing a little help before he can get cleared, and I want yuh to understand that the Circle Cross is willing to help yuh in any way we can."

"Good!" grunted the old squaw.

But Lorna did not express any thanks for his offer. He looked keenly at her before he turned toward the door. She gave him a sidelong glance as he went out through the door, but it was not a look of gratitude.

She heard him gallop away, going back toward the Circle Cross, and then she sat down beside the table. The old squaw had put away her pipe and was softly crooning a Sioux cradle-song, a chanting, tuneless thing that recited the superiority of the Sioux papoose over anything else on earth. It was one of the first things Lorna remembered, but she shuddered just now. It seemed so foolish to think that the Indian could be superior.

"Perhaps," she told herself, "it is the white blood that rises above the red and makes me dislike Indian songs."

The squaw finished the song and started all over again. Lorna got to her feet and walked to the door, as if to get away from the song, and as she looked out into the sunlight, two riders, the two men who had lifted their hats to her in Wolf Wells, were riding up to the house.

Jimmy, the half-breed, was working around one of the corrals, but when he saw the two men he came up toward the house. Hashknife and Sleepy took off their hats and spoke to Lorna pleasantly.

"We was just ridin' around, ma'am, and thought mebbe we could get a drink of water," explained Hashknife, "We tried to take a drink out of the little creek below here, but it was a little too bitter with alkali."

"We have plenty of water," replied the girl, and turned to the half-breed.

"Jimmy, will you get some water from the well? These men want a drink."

Jimmy squinted at the two cowboys for a moment before he turned and went around the house. Hashknife and Sleepy dismounted and came up to the steps, just as Mrs. Cassidy came over to the door.

"Hello, mother," smiled Hashknife. "How are you today?"

The old squaw smiled broadly at the title and nodded pleasantly. Hashknife turned to Lorna.

"This is the Tomahawk ranch, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Uh-huh. Yuh see, I wasn't sure. Somebody told us that we'd likely get shot if we came here, but we don't believe everythin' we hear."

Lorna smiled, but there was little happiness in it.

"I am glad you did not believe," she replied. "We have never killed any one."

"Sure yuh ain't," agreed Sleepy heartily. "I can jist look at you and see that yuh never. Gosh dang it, some folks sure do get things twisted."

Hashknife squinted sidewise at Sleepy and a grin spread his lips. Sleepy saw the grin and shuffled his feet nervously.

"Well," he said defensively, "can't you, Hashknife?"

"I never disputed yuh, cowboy," grinned Hashknife.

Jimmy came around the corner with a bucket of water and the two cowboys quenched their thirst.

"Best water I ever drank," declared Sleepy. "Never knowed that water could taste so danged good. Betcha I'll be ridin' this way real often f'r my drinks. Don'tcha know." Sleepy was almost confidential. "I wonder why men drink strong liquor, when water tastes so good."

"Now, little Dew-drop, don't get so enthusiastic," advised Hashknife seriously, and then to Lorna—

"He's the same way over everythin', ma'am."

"He likes water," said the old squaw.

"Under bridges," admitted Hashknife. "Sleepy—say, I plumb forgot to introduce us. I'm Hashknife Hartley and this here water-soaked pardner of mine is named Sleepy Stevens."

"I am Lorna Cassidy," said the girl, "and this is my mother, Mrs. Cassidy."

"We're sure pleased to meetcha," said Sleepy, bowing gracefully, but kicking over the water-bucket at the same time.

"You've gotta watch him all the time," explained Hashknife, as Sleepy hastened to right the bucket. "He'll get his feet right into anythin' that's got water in it."

Sleepy stood up, a grin on his flushed face. Lorna was laughing and a wide grin

overspread the old squaw's face. Jimmy, the half-breed stepped in and held out his hand to Hashknife.

"I'm Jimmy," he said. "Nobody speak my name."

Hashknife and Sleepy shook hands solemnly with him.

"You'll excuse me, won't yuh Jimmy?" asked Hashknife, "and we both thank yuh for the water."

Jimmy grinned.

"Plenty water. You want more?"

"No, thank yuh, Jimmy. If there was any more water around here, I'd have to get a canoe for Sleepy. He can't swim a lick."

Jimmy grunted and went away with the bucket. He had no sense of humor, but he instinctively liked these two cowpunchers. Perhaps it was because they shook hands with him and treated him as an equal.

"My man in jail," said Mrs. Cassidy, as if explaining his absence. "Can't get out. Too — much law."

"Yeah, I reckon that's right, mother," said Hashknife, "but he'll get out."

"Won't you come in?" asked Lorna. "It is cool in the house."

"Betcha we will," agreed Sleepy quickly. "I'm about fried to a cinder."

Jimmy followed them into the house and sat down against the wall.

"Ben Lanpher lives here, don't he?" asked Hashknife.

"He has been staying here," corrected Lorna. "Do you know him?"

"He was pointed out to me, and they said he was livin' here."

"Too much whisky," grunted the old squaw.

Hashknife smiled and rolled a cigaret. He had been afraid to ask questions in Wolf Wells for fear that some one might find out that he and Sleepy were investigating the rustling situation.

"You folks been losin' any cattle?" he asked.

Lorna nodded quickly.

"Yes, I think so. Dad insists that we have. He told everybody that he was losing cattle, and two days after that we found a card pinned to the front door. It had been written with a pencil and told us to keep our mouths shut or something worse than loss of cattle would come to us."

"Don't talk about it," advised Jimmy warningly.

Hashknife and Sleepy exchanged glances. They knew now why there was no talk about the rustlers. It was the fear of the unknown that had shut the lips of the cattlemen. It was a condition that would make every man suspect his neighbor.

"Where do the cattle go?" asked Hashknife. "You've got to have a market for stolen stock. Is there any way out of here, except by railroad, where cattle could have been sent?"

Lorna shook her head.

"I can't talk about it with you," she said. "You are strangers to us, and for all we know you may belong to the Ghost Hills gang. Every one is afraid around here. Two men have already been killed and I think they were killed by the rustlers, but we have no proofs."

"Ghost Hills gang, eh?" said Hashknife thoughtfully. "Have they ever been seen by any one?"

"No seeum," grunted the old squaw.

"Sort of fantom riders, eh?" grinned Sleepy. "I dunno whether we want jobs in this range or not, Hashknife. I'm kinda spooky m'self."

"Does kinda make a feller feel creepy," admitted Hashknife seriously, "and I don't blame you folks for not talkin' too much. I don't suppose the sheriff is spendin' much time tryin' to round 'em up."

"He stay home," grunted Jimmy. "Sheriff smart man."

Hashknife laughed softly and picked up his hat.

"Well, folks, I reckon we'll drift along. Can we cut straight across the hills to Wolf Wells?"

"Yeah," grunted Jimmy. "No fence, no trail. Not so long as road."

Lorna followed them to the door and watched them mount.

"Will you come again?" she asked, just a trifle wistfully.

"Unless the ghost riders plug me first," said Sleepy quickly.

"She meant both of us," grinned Hashknife, as they rode away. "Sleepy, you sure do lose what little sense yuh got when yuh see a pretty girl."

"Well, by golly, she sure is a pretty girl, Hashknife. She's got Lanpher's daughter beat four ways from the jack."

Hashknife turned in his saddle and looked keenly at Sleepy, who was looking back toward the Tomahawk ranch-house. Sleepy

turned and encountered Hashknife's gaze. "Rope's draggin' ag'in, Sleepy," warned Hashknife.

"Lemme alone, will yuh?" snapped Sleepy, spurring his horse ahead and up the brushy slope.

"There's some nice lookin' girls in the city," said Hashknife, quoting what Sleepy had said the night he had met Miss Lanpher.

But Sleepy only grunted. He and Hashknife had been partners for years, riding the ranges from Alberta to Mexico, and both were still heart and fancy free. Neither of them had ever been willing to marry and settle down. No range had ever been home to them for more than a few months at a time, and neither of them was young.

Both of them bore scars of conflict, and behind them were greater scars, which they had left in payment of injustice to others. They did not seek trouble, but, as Hashknife had said:

"There's an antidote for every kind of poison, Sleepy. Some of it ain't nothin' more than salt-water or soapsuds, but it does the trick. Poison is poison, whether it's somethin' yuh get out of a bottle or somethin' that grows in yore soul.

"When me and you first started hornin' into dirty deals, I figured we was professional trouble-shooters, but I've come to the conclusion that the good Lord intended us as an antidote for range poison. And we've sure cured a lot of hard cases."

"And never profited thereby," reminded Sleepy.

"No-o-o, but yuh never heard of soapsuds and salt-water yelpin' for pay. We're just antidotes, thasall."

Sleepy had a habit of falling in love at first sight, but it never went beyond that. Both of them realized that the marriage of one would mean the end of their adventures, and they were not ready to lead a peaceful life.



FAT FLEAGER was putting in a bad afternoon. It was bad enough to have Smoky Cole in town, drunk. Smoky had been drinking alone since the jury had been discharged, and he was beginning to move around, as if defying the whole world.

He had imbibed raw whisky for twenty-four hours, and was still on his feet. Not only was he on his feet, but he was fairly

steady on them. His eye was bloodshot, but not at all bleary.

Fleager had observed Smoky Cole closely, waiting for him to run into some of the folks who had denounced him in the courtroom. Then came Ben Lanpher to add to the slat-like sheriff's troubles. Ben was nearly drunk when he reached town, and he lost no time in bracing his chest against the Lily of the Valley bar and filling his interior with fighting liquor.

Fat lost no time in hot-footing it back to the office and waking Lonesome Hobbs out of his mid-day siesta.

"Nouk," grunted Lonesome. "To — with 'em both. Let 'em git at each other, Fat."

"But me and you have sworn to uphold the law," wailed the sheriff. "We've gotta do it, Lonesome."

"I'll hold her up," agreed Lonesome, getting off the bunk, adjusting his hat and selecting a sawed-off shotgun from the gun-rack.

"Where's all them buckshot shells, Fat?"

"Now whatcha goin' to do?"

"Shoot — out of both of 'em. It's gettin' so a fuf-feller can't even sleep around here. Where's the shells?"

"Aw-w-w, go lay down!" wailed the sheriff. "You ain't no help to me, Lonesome. You're either as lazy as the —, or as bloodthirsty as a cannibal. I hired yuh as a deputy and all I got was a drawback."

"Well, whatcha want me to do?" grunted Lonesome. "I only know how to do two things real well—sleep and shoot. You woke me up, darn yuh, and now yuh won't let me know where them shells are. You ain't noways consistent."

"Yuh might use a little brains!" snapped the sheriff.

"If I had brains—" The cot creaked raspily, as Lonesome stretched himself out again— "If I had brains I'd never live in Wolf Wells, I'll tell yuh that, Fat Fleager. Anyway, it ain't no job for a fat man, this ain't. All you've got to do is stand sideways and nobody can hit yuh. With me—"

Lonesome lifted his head and looked toward the door, but the sheriff had gone, and Lonesome did not finish his sentence.

Then he groaned dismally, got off the cot and buckled on his belt. He was in no mood to be trifled with now. It was his

usual siesta time, and he meant to make it worth losing sleep over.

With Ben Lanpher in the Lily of the Valley, and Smoky Cole in the Antelope saloon, the sheriff planted himself between the two, which were half-a-block apart, and made a resolution that they—Ben and Smoky—must be kept apart.

The fact that one of them did not know the other was in town helped the sheriff considerably. Lonesome looked witheringly upon the watchful sheriff and went into the Lily of the Valley, where he found Ben Lanpher, standing with his shoulder-blades sort of hooked over the top of the bar, while he considered things of importance.

Lonesome Hobbs was no diplomat. He knew that Ben was just drunk enough to pick trouble. His bleary eye and the belligerent angle of his sombrero proclaimed to Lonesome that Bennie was contemplating starting something.

Lonesome walked up to the bar beside Ben, as if to buy a drink, turned swiftly and kicked Bennie's feet from under him. And while Bennie was going down in a sitting position, Lonesome uppercut him with a right fist, which landed Bennie into dream-land.

Then, while everything in the saloon suspended operations to watch him, Lonesome removed Bennie's gun, flipped out the cartridges and replaced the gun.

"And that's some sudden!" exclaimed the bartender.

"Dud-danged right," admitted Lonesome, and to the crowd—

"When he wakes up, you tell him to high-tail it out of town, 'cause I'm comin' back to make both sides of his face match up."

Then Lonesome went out of there, walking stiff-legged, and headed for the Antelope. The sheriff was still planted in the same spot, but Lonesome walked past him, as if the sheriff was a stranger. He spoke to Lonesome, but got no reply.

Lonesome went into the Antelope and found Smoky in a poker-game. Or rather, Smoky was half-in and half-out of the game. He was standing up, leaning across the table and talking in uncertain and very profane terms over what he declared to be a deliberate attempt to swindle him out of a pot.

Smoky was just drunk enough to be vile

in his language, and dangerous withal. He was standing up in front of his chair when Lonesome's right hand hooked into his gaudy muffler, and a moment later he went over backward, taking the chair with him, and landed on the back of his head with a thud.

It knocked all the fight out of Smoky, and his mind was a blank during the time that Lonesome removed his gun and took out the cartridges. Smoky had no friends in the place to assist him, and those present seemed to get a lot of fun out of the incident.

"Tell him to rattle his hocks out of town," said Lonesome. "He's been makin' himself ob-obnoxious around here, and I'll be watchin' the front door for his goin'. Me and the sheriff is plumb tired of bein' annoyed."

Lonesome went out of the door and crossed the street toward the office, without looking at the sheriff, who was still holding forth between the two saloons. Lonesome went into the office and planted himself near the front window, after placing the sawed-off shotgun handy.

It was several minutes later that Ben Lanpher came to the door of the Lily of the Valley. His right hand caressed the side of his head and he seemed undecided as to what he intended doing. He took stock of the fact that the sheriff was between him and the Antelope saloon, but started walking toward him.

About this time Smoky Cole staggered out of the Antelope, his hat in his hand. He was also a trifle erratic in his movements, and perhaps a bit near-sighted after the bump on his head, because he too started toward the sheriff.

There was nothing for the sheriff to do but to move away from between them, which he did and did quickly.

"Don'tcha start nothin'!" he yelled. "Don'tcha —"

But his warning was wasted. The two belligerents had recognized each other. For a moment they hesitated, then two hands reached for two guns. Smoky was the faster of the two. His gun was out before Ben had started his draw, but the hammer fell upon an empty cylinder.

Swiftly his thumb hooked the hammer, and again the dull click of a dead cylinder. Ben's gun was leveled now, but his efforts were as unavailing as were Smoky's. But

Smoky did not hear the click of Ben's gun, because Smoky was going away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Ben did not pay any attention to Smoky's going, because a quick glance told him that his gun was empty, and he turned to run the other way. Lonesome whooped with glee and fell backward on the cot, while the sheriff, after a glance in either direction, hurried across to the office.

Lonesome sat up and looked at the sheriff, his eyes filled with tears. The sheriff was a trifle pale and his lips worked soundlessly.

"What's the matter with you?" choked Lonesome.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I—I'm glad to hear your voice, Lonesome. I thought I had lost my hearin'. Them two guns —"

"Were empty," finished Lonesome. "Ha, ha, ha, ha! They never thought to look at 'em, and nobody told that I took out the shells."

"You took 'em out?"

"Yeah, I took 'em out," laughed Lonesome, and then told the sheriff what he had done to both men.

The sheriff went to the door and looked into the street. Ben Lanpher was mounting his horse, and a moment later rode away toward home. He was unsteady in his saddle and lost his hat, but did not stop to recover it.

It was probably ten minutes later that Smoky Cole rode out of the livery-stable and headed toward home. He was savagely drunk and took out his spite on his horse, which almost threw him off in front of the sheriff's office.

"Well, they're gone and I hope they never come back," declared the sheriff fervently.

"You and me both," agreed Lonesome wearily. "It's gittin so a fuf-feller can't even sleep around here. Next time I'll take a hammer and nails with me and nail their pants to the floor. I'll betcha they'll stay put next time I have to git out of mum-my sleep to correct 'em."

"You think you're a little bit of —, don'tcha?" queried the sheriff sarcastically.

"Not such a little bit either," retorted Lonesome. "I've got the stren'th to hold up the law, y'betcha."



HASHKNIFE and Sleepy were riding in from the other end of town, and the sheriff watched them ride up to the front of the office and dismount. He was not exactly sure whether he liked these two punchers or not. Still their smiles were friendly enough, but he was not sure that they were not laughing at him.

"Howdy," greeted Hashknife. "How's tricks?"

"Tricks are fine," yelled Lonesome. "I jist pup-played a dinger. Lemme tell yuh about it."

And with great gusto and much stuttering, Lonesome told them how he had treated the two drunken punchers.

"And Fat Fleager thought he'd lost his hearin', 'cause he couldn't hear 'em shoot-in'," concluded Lonesome. "Mamma mine, I never done nothin' half as good before."

"Didja think they'd do that, when yuh took the shells out of their guns?" asked Hashknife.

"I wasn't sure of nothin'," admitted Lonesome, "but it sure worked out swell."

"Now they'll pack a grudge agin' you," declared the sheriff.

"And I'll pack a riot-gun," said Lonesome laughing.

"Kind of a tough place yuh got here," said Hashknife, sitting down on the sidewalk and producing his papers and tobacco. "Cattle fade out and folks get shot. You kinda got yore hands full, ain't yuh, sheriff?"

The sheriff nodded slowly and shoved his hands deeply into his pockets.

"Yeah, I reckon things are kinda unsettled, Hartley."

"You fellers find a job yet?" Thus Lonesome, as if to change the subject.

"Not yet," grinned Hashknife. "Jobs is scarce."

"If I wanted a job punchin' cows, I'd sure pass up the Ghost Hills range," observed the sheriff. "There's lots of better ranges than this, where there's always a need for top-hands."

"Yeah, I reckon that's right," agreed Hashknife. "It ain't noways the best. The Circle Cross is the best outfit around here, ain't it?"

"Yeah, I reckon it is. They run more cattle than any other outfit around here—or did until—say, did yuh go over to the

Flying M? Old man Shappee might have a job for one of yuh. It's about four miles east of here. And there's the 66 outfit about seven miles kinda south of here."

"We was just ridin' around today," explained Hashknife. "We ran across the Tomahawk ranch-house, but they ain't hirin' nobody."

"That's a cinch," said Lonesome, grinning widely. "They never did hire anybody. Old Cassidy and Jimmy Droop-drawers done all the work. Mebbe Ben Lanpher is doin' somethin' since old Cassidy git into jail, but I doubt it. He's so soaked with hooch that he's no good to anybody."

"Who is this here Ben Lanpher?" asked Hashknife.

"Millionaire kid," grunted the sheriff. "His father owns half of the Circle Cross. Lives in Frisco, I think. Sent the kid out here to learn the cattle business and he took a post-graduate course in whisky and six-guns. He was at the Circle Cross for quite a while, but he got stuck on Cassidy's daughter, pulled off a quarrel with Jim Trainor and hooked up with the Tomahawk. He says he's goin' to marry that breed girl, but I doubt it."

"So do I," agreed Sleepy, and added quickly. "He'd never stay sober long enough for that."

Hashknife chuckled to himself and tried to catch Sleepy's eye, but Sleepy was busy examining his fingernails and would not look up.

"It's a wonder that his father wouldn't make him come home," said Hashknife. "Somebody'll kill him if he don't pull the kink out of his neck."

"Well, sir, he's got a nice father, too," observed the sheriff. "I kinda like Lanpher. Not a — bit like the kid. He was here about a year or so ago—him and his wife and daughter."

"And that daughter is a dinger," wheezed Lonesome. "Prettiest girl I ever seen. She sure was a promisin' lookin' filly, but Jim Trainor kinda close-herded her all the time. By golly, there was a lot of punchers that'd given their right eye to even dance with her. Her ma high-toned everybody, but papa was sort of a harmless hoptoad."

Lonesome laughed and shook his head sadly.

"Mamma looked right over my huh-head, when I tried to shake hands with her. I told her to set her sights lower if she

wanted to connect with me and she got sore. Anyway, I got papa drunk and he confided that he had high ideas for daughter. I often wonder if he hit what he was aimin' at."

"And they ain't been here since, eh?" This from Sleepy.

"Nope. Their little son stayed, thasall. And I'll tell a man that this country didn't draw much when they got him."

"Lots of cattle shipped out of here?" asked Hashknife.

"Ain't been for a while." The sheriff shook his head. "Oh, there's a few bein' shipped now and then, but no big shipments. The 66 outfit shipped some horses the other day, didn't they, Lonesome?"

"Gosh, I dunno," Lonesome yawned widely. "I never keep track of them kinda things. It keeps me busy knockin' down drunken bad-men. Ho-o-o—hum-m-m!"

"Why don'tcha try sleepin' for it?" asked Hashknife.

"Try it?" snorted the sheriff. "My — he don't do nothin' else but sleep."

"Don't I?"

Lonesome slapped himself on the chest.

"I went out and cleaned up on the bad-men, while the sheriff planted himself over there on the sidewalk and got cockeyed from tryin' to watch both ways at once."

"Yuh should 'a' seen him, gents. He seen Smoky comin' one way and Bennie the other. Then he yelps:

"'Don'tcha start nothin'!' Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Lonesome roared his mirth and the sheriff whirled and went into the office, quivering with indignation.

"Now he's mad at me," wailed Lonesome, "and I suppose he'll fire me, and I won't have no more job than a jackrabbit. That's just my luck."

"You think yore kinda — smart, don'tcha?" growled the harassed sheriff.

"Well," Lonesome sighed gleefully, "it isn't as bad as I thought it was. When Fat gets to blamin' me for bein' smart, I know everythin' is all right."

Lonesome began manufacturing a cigaret and the conversation stopped for a few minutes. A loaded wagon creaked down the street, stirring up a cloud of dust. Over in front of the Antelope saloon a couple of cowpunchers mounted and rode away, arguing loudly over something that neither

of them knew anything about. Up the street a couple of dogs started a battle, which was a signal to every dog in town to come and look on.

Hashknife inhaled deeply on his cigaret and motioned with his arm to take in the whole town.

"Boys, this is the kind of a town to live in. They can all have their cities—give me the old cow-town."

"Huh!"

Lonesome flipped away his match and stared at Hashknife.

"Pardner, you've got a —— of an idea of a place to live. You ain't been around much, have yuh?"

"No-o-o, not a whole lot."

"I guess you ain't."

"Here comes an old-timer," observed Sleepy, pointing up the street. "Betcha he struck the mother-lode."

It was a bearded old prospector, astride a bony, gray horse, and trailing him was a decrepit-looking pack-horse, with pack askew and a limp in one leg.

The one-man caravan came straight to the office and the bearded man shaded his eyes from the sun, as he spelled out the sheriff's sign over the door.

"Howdy, stranger," said Lonesome. "Somethin' I can do for yuh?"

"You the sheriff?" asked the bearded one anxiously.

"No, I'm his hired bad-man buster," grinned Lonesome.

Just then the sheriff came to the door, and Lonesome jerked his thumb in that direction.

"There's the sheriff—such as he is."

"What do yuh want?" queried the sheriff.

"Well—" The patriarch cleared his throat raspingly and leaned forward in his saddle—"I found a dead man a little while ago."

The sheriff stepped out nearer him.

"Keep on talkin', stranger. Where'd yuh find him?"

"Back up the road a piece. Mebbe it's a couple of miles. He's layin' on his face in the middle of the road. I didn't move him none, I didn't, but I looked at him enough to know that he's dead. Been shot in the back of the head, 'cordin' to what I observed."

"What did he look like?" queried Lonesome.

"I told yuh he's layin' on his face—kinda

rootin' into the dust. Got on chaps and overalls and a shirt. Jist a little ways before I finds this here dead man, I finds this in the road."

He drew a six-shooter from the waistband of his overalls and handed it to the sheriff. It was a Colt single-action .44 caliber.

"Say yuh found it in the road?" asked the sheriff, examining the gun closely.

"Yeah. I thinks to myself that I've found me a good gun, but when I finds the dead man, I decides to turn the gun over to the sheriff. It's been shot once."

"I see it has," nodded the sheriff, and then to Lonesome—

"Get a hack from the livery-stable and we'll go out after this dead man."

Lonesome bow-legged his way across the street and down to the stable, while the sheriff went back through his office to the stable, where he and Lonesome kept their saddle-horses.

The old prospector turned and studied the saloon signs across the street, spat dryly and rode over to the Antelope to quench a thirst that was probably of long standing.

"Who do yuh reckon got killed, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy, as they waited for the sheriff.

"Probably that fool Lanpher. Here comes the sheriff."

They swung on to their horses and joined Fleager, without waiting for Lonesome.

"He'll come along after while," assured the sheriff. "We'll go ahead and investigate."

It took them only a short time to reach the spot, where the man was lying. On both sides of the road was a heavy thicket of brush and rocks. The sheriff dismounted and turned the man over.

It was Smoky Cole. Hashknife and Sleepy swung down and the three of them made a minute examination. Cole had been shot from behind, the bullet striking him almost at the base of the brain.

"Never knowed what hit him," declared the sheriff, standing up and dusting his knees.

"His gun is still in its holster, too," said Hashknife as he drew the gun out and looked it over. All the chambers were loaded and the barrel was clean.

"Kinda looks like he never had a chance, sheriff."

The sheriff nodded gloomily and began searching for tracks in the deep dust.

"I wonder where Sandy Claws found that six-gun."

"Said it was a little beyond here," said Sleepy. "It was prob'ly beyond that curve, and we can likely see where he picked it up."

They left the body and walked up the road, searching for the place where the old man had dismounted to pick up the gun. About fifty yards beyond the first turn in the road they found the spot.

"Here's where the gun was dropped," observed the sheriff, pointing at the footprints in the road.

Hashknife was looking a little farther on, and now he crossed the road, reached into the brush and picked up a black sombrero.

"Here's a hat," he called, and walked back to the sheriff.

It was a fairly new Stetson, but badly soiled, and in the sweat-band was punched the initials "B. L."

"Ben Lanpher," declared the sheriff thoughtfully. "That's his hat. He probably bushwhacked Smoky and lost his hat and gun in his getaway. And he was likely so drunk that he never thought to stop and get 'em."

As they walked back to the body, Lonesome drove into view and managed to turn his team around near the body.

It did not take Lonesome long to find out all they knew and he shook his head sadly.

"I knowed it," he declared. "Yuh can't mix whisky and six-guns. Well," optimistically, "the county ain't loser none to speak about, Fat."

"Mebbe not," grunted the sheriff, and motioned for them to help him put the body into the hack.

Lonesome climbed back to his seat and the sheriff gave his orders where to deliver the body.

"Ain't you goin' back with us?" queried Lonesome.

"Nope, not now. I've got to go and get Ben Lanpher."

"Goin' to give him a medal?" grinned Lonesome.

"Goin' to arrest him for murder."

"Aw, for gosh sake! You don't call this murder, do yuh?"

"Well—" The sheriff mounted and adjusted his holster—"well, yuh couldn't very well call it self-defense, Lonesome. Smoky

never drew his gun, and he was shot from behind. No, I reckon Bennie is sure up ag'in' it good and strong."

The sheriff rode on toward the Tomahawk, while Lonesome spluttered at the team and drove back toward Wolf Wells, with Hashknife and Sleepy riding behind the wagon.

"Gosh, this sure will be a jolt to old man Lanpher," observed Sleepy sadly.

"Yeah," sighed Hashknife. "I sure feel sorry for them folks. I wonder if the sheriff knows Lanpher's address in Frisco."

"You know it, don't yuh?"

"Yeah, but I don't want anybody to know that I do."

He called to Lonesome and asked him about the Lanpher family.

"I don't know his address, and I don't reckon that Fat does either," replied Lonesome. "Jim Trainor'd know it."

"Suppose we ride to the Circle Cross and tell Trainor? He'd probably want to know about Smoky Cole."

"That's a good idea," admitted Lonesome. "You go ahead."

Lonesome drove on, and the two cowboys turned and rode back up the highway toward the Circle Cross.

Hashknife was very thoughtful, but finally turned to Sleepy.

"Cowboy, it kinda looks like we've bit off a big chaw."

"Sure does," agreed Sleepy, "and there don't seem to be no handy place to start chawin', does there?"

Hashknife shook his head, his eyes squinted thoughtfully.

"No, there don't, Sleepy. I reckon its a fact that a gang of rustlers are makin' a cleanup in this range, but everybody is scared to talk about it."

"It must 'a' been that gang who killed the two cattle detectives, but I don't think they had anythin' to do with this killin' today."

"Mebbe old man Cassidy is one of the gang," suggested Sleepy.

"Might be. As far as that's concerned, Ben Lanpher might be one of 'em, too. It looks to me like Smoky Cole tried to convict old Cassidy at that trial. He sure stuck for conviction. I'm just wonderin' if Smoky Cole didn't try to make love to Lorna Cassidy, and that was why the old man drew a dead-line against the Circle Cross outfit."

"Smoky was a mean sort of a jasper, and that would be his idea of revenge, to hang the old man. Still I don't think that Ben belongs to the rustlers, because he wouldn't hardly steal from his own father."

"How about that warning that Lorna told us about, Hashknife?"

"Don't mean anythin', Sleepy. They'd naturally want everybody to think they was sufferin', too. But where in — are they disposin' of the stock? Workin' in the dark thisaway is kinda hard, don'tcha know it? And we can't ask a lot of fool questions, because we don't know when we're talkin' to some of the gang."

They passed the spot where Cole had been killed, and took the right-hand road at the forks, which wound in and out of the brushy coulees and into a wide swale on the bank of a creek where the Circle Cross buildings were located.



IT WAS growing late, but there was still enough light to show that the Circle Cross was no small outfit. The ranch-house was pretentious in size, the barns, fences and corrals were in good repair, and even the front yard of the ranch-house seemed well-kept.

"Looks like the teepee of a millionaire," observed Sleepy, as they dismounted at the ranch-house.

A fat Chinese answered their knock at the front door and nodded solemnly when they asked for Trainor.

"Yessah, he in. I call."

"Who's out there?" yelled Trainor's voice.

"This is Hartley," called Hashknife.

"Come on in and rest your feet."

They followed the Chinaman into the living-room, and in a few moments Trainor came in. He was carrying a bottle of liquor and some glasses, and seemed a trifle unsteady in his walk.

"Glad to see yuh," he boomed. "Welcome to the Circle Cross, gents. I've just been tryin' out some new liquor and I find that it has a lot of authority."

He started to pour out a glass.

"Say when, Hartley."

"When!" grunted Hashknife quickly.

"Say, that ain't half-full, cowboy. Why —"

"Too late in the afternoon, and we ain't been fed since breakfast."

"You ain't?" Trainor turned and yelled toward the kitchen.

"Hey, Quong! Throw on a couple of steaks. Cut 'em thick, yuh hear me?"

"Yessah, can do," called the Chinaman.

"Wait a minute," begged Hashknife. "We didn't come out here to bum a meal and a drink, Trainor; we came to tell you that Smoky Cole was killed a little while ago, and that the sheriff has gone to arrest Ben Lanpher for murder."

Trainor stared at Hashknife, started to put the bottle on the table, but missed, and it fell to the floor, where its contents gurgled out over a fine Navajo rug.

"Smoky Cole? How did this happen, Hartley?"

Hashknife explained how Cole's body had been found and how the evidence all pointed to Ben Lanpher. He told Trainor of the bloodless gun-fight at Wolf Wells, and that Ben Lanpher had ridden away ahead of Smoky Cole.

"And he shot Smoky from the brush, eh?" Trainor's jaw muscles bulged angrily. "Never gave him a chance. Wait a minute."

Trainor stepped out onto the front porch and yelled at two cowpunchers, who were down near a corral. Hashknife and Sleepy followed him out and watched the two men come up to them. Hashknife and Sleepy had never seen these two, and Trainor introduced them as "Buck" Avery and "Poco" Saunders.

Avery was a square-faced, pig-eyed, medium-sized man, about thirty years of age, whose face was badly marked from smallpox.

Saunders was of medium height, but thin-faced and as dark as a Mexican. His eyes were sullen and the pupils seemed flecked with red. After a searching glance, which seemed to take in every inch of both Hashknife and Sleepy, Saunders kept his eyes on Trainor's face, while Trainor repeated what Hashknife had told him.

Buck Avery swore witheringly, but Saunders said nothing when they learned that Smoky Cole was dead.

"We'll all have a drink and then go to town," said Trainor. "C'mon."

But Poco Saunders did not accept the invitation. He turned and walked back toward the corral, without a word.

"He was Smoky's bunkie," said Trainor, which seemed sufficient explanation for refusing to drink.

"Poco don't drink much, anyway,"

added Buck, "but I feel like a drink would kinda take the edge off a shock like that. It ain't that it's any surprize t'me, though. Smoky always got mean when he was drinkin', but he thought he was such a — of a gunman that he'd git past with anythin'."

"He was shot from behind," reminded Sleepy.

"Which'll make it go hard with Ben Lanpher," nodded Buck over his drink. "It's a fine start for a kid like him, and I feel a lot more sorry for his folks than I do for him. Yuh goin' to wire 'em, ain'tcha, Trainor?"

"Just as soon as I get to town, Buck. Let's go."

Poco Saunders had saddled his horse and was waiting for them. Hashknife studied Poco, while Trainor and Buck Avery were saddling, and decided that Poco was a very sinister-looking young man; and might well be marked with a danger signal.

Whereas Smoky Cole was a talkative gunman, prone to boast of his prowess and more or less audible threatening, Poco would probably shoot first and talk about it later, if at all.

Trainor and Avery rode out from the corral, joined them, and the five of them headed for Wolf Wells at a gallop. Hashknife showed them where Smoky's body had been discovered, and where Ben Lanpher's gun and hat had been picked up, but Poco showed no interest in this.

Trainor looked curiously at Poco, who went on without them.

"Hit him kinda hard, I reckon," he observed. "Him and Smoky were bunkies for a long time. Poco's a good puncher, but he ain't got much sense."

"Part Mexican?" asked Hashknife.

"He's got some Mexican blood in him, I reckon," replied Buck. "Used to talk it a little once in a while. That's where he got his nickname."

They rode into town and went straight to the sheriff's office, where they found several men talking with the sheriff. He had brought Ben Lanpher back with him and had locked him in a cell.

"He was still drunk," said the sheriff, "and he sure was a meek jasper. Didn't object to bein' locked up, except to tell me he never done it. Mebbe he was so drunk that he didn't know when he shot Cole. I dunno."

"Man never gets so drunk that he don't remember bushwhackin' and killin' a man," declared Hashknife.

"Dang right he don't," agreed Lonesome Hobbs. "That ain't no alibi," and added sadly, "I wish I'd let their guns alone t' day. One or both of 'em would 'a' got killed, but it would 'a' been legal. I s'pose I've got to spend most of my time feedin' and takin' care of prisoners now. Thank gosh, we've only got two cells. If we get any more prisoners we'll have to pasture 'em out some'ers."

A man came across the street and joined the group. He was a sallow-faced man, with tobacco-stained teeth and ink-stained fingers.

"I was just comin' down to send a telegram to Lanpher," said Trainor, addressing the newcomer. "You heard what happened, didn't yuh, Whitey?"

"Yeah, I heard about it. Looks kinda bad for the kid."

Trainor walked away with Whitey, going to the depot, and Hashknife and Sleepy put their horses into a corral. At the depot, Trainor sent a long message to William Lanpher, giving him the details of the trouble.

"There's a telegram here for yuh, Trainor," said the depot agent, as he checked off the words on Trainor's message.

"I was goin' to send it out to yuh, if somebody was goin' out your way. This'll cost yuh a dollar and sixty cents."

Trainor paid for the message and walked out. At the edge of the platform he tore open the envelope and read the message, a serious frown on his face. Then he grinned softly and went back up the street.



WHEN Ben Lanpher sobered up he failed to become the least bit repentant over what had happened to him. Trainor had consulted with George Mitchell, the lawyer from San Francisco, and had hired him to defend Ben, but Ben would have none of him.

Hashknife and Sleepy talked with the sheriff about Lanpher.

"He's loco," declared the sheriff. "Tells a tale that no jury would believe."

"What about?" queried Hashknife.

"Aw, he says he never bushwhacked Cole a-tall."

"I'd like to talk with him a while,"

observed Hashknife, "and see if he tells the same thing twice."

"Might be a good idea," agreed Lonesome Hobbs. "Me and Fat'll listen and see what it sounds like."

"Prob'ly won't talk to yuh. Mitchell comes down here to have a talk with him, but he cussed Mitchell plumb out of the jail. Mitchell told him that Trainor hired him to defend him, and it made Lanpher sore as —. I'll see if Ben'll talk to yuh."

The sheriff came back in a few minutes with the information that Ben was willing to talk to anybody who wasn't connected with the Circle Cross outfit. They went through the office and into the rear, where two cells were built in at the back of the room.

Old Pinto Cassidy scowled at them through the bars, but noticed that they were strangers and became more friendly. Ben came to the barred door and squinted at Hashknife.

"I know you," he said hoarsely. "You're the jasper that winked over my shoulder. By — that seems a long time ago. What did yuh want to see me for?"

"Ye don't have to talk with 'em, if ye don't want to, remimber that, Ben," warned Cassidy. "Ye have to be careful who ye talk wid in here. Sure, it's a — of a place to be in, so it is."

"That's all right, Cassidy," grunted Ben. "I've nothin' to conceal."

"Then tell us about it," urged Hashknife. "What did you do after you left town yesterday?"

Ben forced a laugh and tried to peer around the corner of his door.

"I remember that Lonesome Hobbs played a dirty trick on me. After that I got on my horse and started home. I was pretty drunk—too drunk to ride fast, and I had a bad horse.

"I loaded my gun on the way, I remember that because I dropped some shells and got off to pick 'em up. I had a hard time getting back on my bronc, but finally made it.

"Then I seen Smoky Cole coming. He was quite a ways behind me, but he was foggin' right along as though he was tryin' to catch me. I didn't want him to catch me, because I was just sober enough to know that a killing out there might look like murder.

"I rode on, but had a lot of trouble with that — horse of mine. He almost threw

me a couple of times, and I guess we wasted a lot of time along that brushy road. All to once, I thought that Smoky was shootin' at me."

Ben grinned wearily and shook his head.

"No, I didn't see Smoky at all, but I sure heard him shoot. I drew my gun and waited for him to swing around the curve, but I guess I was just drunk enough to cause me to accidentally pull the trigger. Anyway, I felt the gun kick out of my hand, and then that fool bronc started to buck again. That was the first time I ever shot off that horse, and I guess it was scared stiff.

"Anyway, we must have gone real fast, because I remember we were close to the Tomahawk when I got my reins back again. And that's all, except that the sheriff woke me up later on and told me I had killed Smoky Cole."

Hashknife nodded over his cigaret.

"That's the whole story," sighed Ben.

"And, by golly, it's a good one, too," added Cassidy. "You stick to that story, me lad. I stuck to mine—and look where I am."

Hashknife laughed at Cassidy. Squawman he might be; a bitter old cattleman he surely was, but he still retained his sense of humor.

"If Cole had been killed several days ago, you might be a free man now, Cassidy," said Hashknife.

"Ah, that's true, me lad; but I'd suffer a long time in jail, if the poor misguided lad could be brought back to life. He was but goin' accordin' to his own lights, so he was."

"Then he had a — poor light!" snapped Ben.

"A lot of us have," sighed Cassidy. "Mine has flickered badly at times. 'Tis hard to sit here the long days and know that me old ranch has no keeper, except Lorna and Jimmy. Sure, that's no job for a bit of a lass and a well-meanin', but poor managin' lad. They'll hold me and Bennie for the nixt term of court, which will be a long, long time away."

"Don't worry about that," assured Sleepy. "We'll do what we can to help yuh out."

"Well, now that's nice of ye," said Cassidy, scratching his head as if wondering why these strangers would promise to help him in any way.

"What do you think of my story?" asked Ben anxiously.

"I dunno," Hashknife shook his head. "It sounds reasonable, Lanpher—to me. But they'll likely hold you for the next term of court. You've got an even break thasall."

"That's all I want."

As they started away, Cassidy called to them:

"Come again, lads. Ye'r the first folks I ever known in Wolf Wells that showed common sense. Ye'll probably not find us out when ye come again."

"All right," laughed Hashknife as they passed out and shut the door behind them.

The sheriff and Lonesome had heard every word, and nodded to the two cow-punchers.

"Same story," said Lonesome, leading the way outside. "Ben sure has got it rehearsed well, or he's tellin' the truth."

"Sounds reasonable, at that," commented Hashknife. "He shot the gun accidental, got his hat bucked off. But who in thunder killed Smoky Cole, if Ben Lanpher didn't?"

The sheriff scowled and shook his head.

"I dunno of anybody that would bushwhack him, Hartley."

"It's kinda gettin' to be a habit around here, ain't it? Trainor has lost two other men in the same way."

"Yeah," breathed the sheriff, "—— it! It makes me nervous to think about it. Feller never knows who's next."

The sheriff looked so lugubrious that Hashknife laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"I reckon yo're safe, as long as yuh don't antagonize the bushwhackers," said Hashknife.

"Huh! Well, I dunno."

Poco Saunders came into the upper end of town, dismounted at the Lily of the Valley hitch-rack, and walked down to them. Poco had a queer, stiff-legged walk, and held his elbows close to his sides.

"Trainor said he wanted to see yuh," he told Hashknife.

"What's he got on his mind?" queried Hashknife.

"I dunno. Bronc stepped on his foot this mornin', and he can't walk. Mebbe he wants to hire yuh? I dunno."

"Did he ask for both of us?" queried Sleepy.

Poco shook his head, turned on his heel and went back toward the saloon.

"He's a queer jigger," observed Lone-

some; "dangdest feller to run out of words thataway."

"He don't talk much, that's a cinch," grinned Hashknife, getting to his feet. "I reckon we'll get a bit to eat, Sleepy."

They walked up to a restaurant and ordered a meal. It was not like Hashknife to accept a job alone, but the circumstances were different this time.

"Well, whatcha goin' to do about it?" asked Sleepy.

"I been wonderin' a lot m'self, Sleepy. Suppose you go out to the Tomahawk and help 'em out a little, cowboy. Keep yore eyes open and yore mouth shut; sabe? I'll take this Circle Cross job, if that's what Trainor wants."

"But——" Hashknife put his hand on Sleepy's arm and spoke softly—"for gosh sake, look out. I've got a feelin' that we're marked right now. This is goin' to be our hardest job, Sleepy. Yuh can't dodge a bullet that's fired at yore back—and that's their game. There's a dirty bunch of murderers in these hills, and they'll hand us a harp if they get a chance."

"But there ain't nothin' to work on," complained Sleepy. "They won't come out into the open and everybody's afraid to say what they think. I'll find out what I can without askin' questions, and if I do stumble on to anythin' worth talkin' about, I'll see yuh real quick."

They finished their meal and went to the corral after their horses. Poco Saunders saw them ride past the saloon, but made no move to join them. About half-way to where the road forked to the Circle Cross, they met Jimmy, the half-breed, from the Tomahawk.

He grinned widely and drew up his broncho.

"You go Tomahawk?" he asked.

"I'm goin' out there," said Sleepy. "Maybe I stay and help for a while."

"That —— good! Both go?"

"No," Hashknife shook his head. "I'm goin' to work for the Circle Cross, Jimmy."

"Not good," Jimmy shook his head.

"You don't like the Circle Cross?"

"No, by ——!"

And then to Sleepy—

"I be back soon."

He spurred his horse ahead and faded out in a cloud of dust.

"The Tomahawk sure does love the Circle Cross," laughed Hashknife. "No wonder

they drew a dead-line. Find out what it was all about, Sleepy. Prob'ly just a personal affair, but we've got to consider everything around here. But don't come bustin' over with the first thing yuh find out. Let it soak into yore mind, cowboy."

They shook hands at the forks of the road and went on their different ways. They had fought their range-battles together for so long that they both felt a trifle helpless apart.

"Some day they'll get us both," mused Hashknife, as he rode slowly along the dusty road. "Yuh can dodge bullets just so long, but they'll get yuh in the end. Dang Sleepy! If he'll only keep his darned eyes open. He needs a keeper, that's what he needs. Mebbe I won't like this Circle Cross job—mebbe."

He found Jim Trainor sitting in an easy chair on the ranch-house porch, a bottle beside him and his right foot swathed in bandages.

"Put up your bronc, Hartley," he called. "You've got a job. Buck will show yuh where to put him."

Buck Avery called from the bunk-house and joined Hashknife at the barn, where they stabled the horse.

"Bronc stepped on Jim's foot," explained Buck. "Dang fool won't send for a doctor, so he can suffer for all of me. Yuh seen Poco, did yuh?"

"Yeah, he sent me out."

They sauntered up to the ranch-house and Trainor yelled for Quong to bring two more glasses. Trainor was already half-drunk, but in a good humor.

"I was wonderin' if Poco would find yuh before yuh got another job," he explained. "You're a top-hand, I can see that, Hartley. Losin' Smoky Cole kinda puts me short-handed, and now I go and get walked on. — horse was sharp-shod, too. Pour your own drinks, gents."

"I ought to be gettin' an answer from Lanpher pretty soon. I found Mitchell, that lawyer, and told him to take the kid's case, but the kid cussed — out of him. That sure is appreciation. I suppose things will have to ride about like they are until Lanpher shows up from Frisco and looks things over. What do you think of the case, Hartley?"

"Well, it kinda looks like the kid was guilty," observed Hashknife. "Mebbe the law will consider that they were both drunk

at the time; but that's a poor defense. A feller ain't so awful drunk when he'll bush-whack a man and kill him the first shot."

"Ben Lanpher is a good shot, too," said Buck Avery. "He never did do nothin' but drink whisky and practise shootin'."

"Two bad things to mix," declared Trainor thoughtfully, and then—

"Where's your partner, Hartley?"

Hashknife looked up quickly.

"Did yuh want to hire him, too?"

"Want to—yes; but I haven't work enough."

"He went out to the Tomahawk ranch. Sleepy's always doin' somethin' for folks, and he kinda thought mebbe they'd need a little help. This deal makes it kinda tough for the Tomahawk."

"That's a fact," Trainor scowled at his glass, shaking his head sadly. "Yuh know, I should 'a' sent one of the boys over there to help 'em out."

"They'd be welcome," laughed Buck. "Welcome, like the smallpox."

"Me and Sleepy came past there a while back," volunteered Hashknife. "Wasn't sure just what ranch it was, but we was kinda dry; so we stopped for a drink. They treated us fine."

"You were lucky," said Trainor, pouring himself another drink. "You work for me and you won't dare go over there."

"They didn't look dangerous. Nobody there, except the old lady, the girl and the half-breed puncher."

"Uh-huh," Trainor's voice was mildly sarcastic. "Don't underrate that half-breed, Hartley. He's one of the best rifle-shots you ever seen."

"Yeah?" Hashknife leaned back against a porch-post and hugged his knees.

"Yuh know, I've never seen such a country for crack-shots as this is. Mostly everybody I've heard spoken about has that reputation. If trouble ever starts there won't be more'n one box of shells needed to kill off the whole dangd population."

Trainor laughed boisterously and handed the bottle to Buck.

"We sure can shoot, can't we, Buck? I betcha Hartley can shoot a few, too, eh, Hartley?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"No-o-o, I wouldn't say that, Trainor. Me and Sleepy never put ourselves up to be good shots, but we're willin' shooters."

Lotsa folks can out-shoot us, but," Hashknife grinned softly, "we're still alive."

"And some of them ain't, eh?" grinned Buck suggestively.

"Every dog has its day," said Hashknife slowly. "None of us can live forever. I always worked on the theory that bein' right gives yuh the edge on folks that do wrong. That's why a horse-thief goes to the end of his rope in a short time. A gunman cuts a short swath. If yuh notice, they don't last long, and it's because they're all wrong. Look at Smoky Cole. Look at Ben Lanpher."

"Your theory don't work out right, Hartley," laughed Trainor. "It wasn't a case of right winnin' out there. Ben Lanpher wasn't any more right than Smoky."

"All right—where's Ben Lanpher? The law got him, and the law is right."

"Oh, to — with such arguments!" blurted Trainor. "Fill up your glass, Hartley. Here comes Poco. Didja tell him to get the mail, Buck?"

"Yeah, I told him," said Buck.

Poco rode down to the stable, put up his horse and came slowly up to the house. He nodded to Hashknife and handed Trainor a telegram. Buck offered Poco a glass and the bottle, but the flinty-faced cowpuncher refused with a shrug of his thin shoulders.

"Telegram from William Lanpher," explained Trainor. "He'll arrive at Wolf Wells tomorrow night. Don't say whether he's alone or not. — it, I told him he ought to take Ben home months ago, but he wouldn't do it."

"Ben is of age," grunted Buck. "He had a birthday about a month ago and celebrated it by gettin' drunk and shootin' at himself in the Antelope mirror. There was busted glass all over the place. Somebody said he'd have bad luck for seven years."

"Mrs. Lanpher'll probably come," said Trainor thickly. "She thinks Ben's a little tin god."

"He's her son." Thus Poco Saunders, speaking for the first time since he arrived.

"He ain't worth worryin' about, that's a cinch," laughed Trainor.

"Good or bad, their mother worries," said Poco flatly, and got to his feet.

He started to say something more, but changed his mind and went down to the bunk-house.

Hashknife looked after him and squinted thoughtfully. He had disliked Poco Saun-

ders—until that remark. It showed that somewhere inside that sinister-looking cowpuncher was a big spark of human nature.

"Good or bad, their mother worries," repeated Hashknife to himself. "She thinks that Ben is a tin-god—but he's her son."

"Queer sort of a jigger," said Buck, noticing that Hashknife was looking toward the bunk-house.

"Poco don't drink like other folks. He won't take a drink until he is ready to get drunk. Then he hides his gun, and proceeds to get goshawful drunk. He won't talk much, but he's no fool, Poco ain't."

"No, I betcha he ain't," agreed Hashknife. "If I was goin' to pick an enemy, I sure wouldn't pick Poco Saunders."

"The killin' of Smoky Cole kinda hit him hard," said Buck. "He used to grin once in a while, but now he goes around with the same hard-faced expression all the time. I'll bet he'd make a scrap-heap out of Ben Lanpher, if he had the chance."

"Aw, to — with 'em all!" snorted Trainor. "Hey! Quong! Bring us another bottle. I'm celebratin' a busted foot and I need a lot of liquor."

"Ex-cuse me then," laughed Hashknife apologetically, "my stummick ain't in good shape, and I never did need much liquor. I'll go down and get used to the bunk-house."

Trainor frowned slightly, but gave a drunken shrug of his shoulders.

"You know your own insides, Hartley. If me and Buck get plumb paralyzed, you and Poco run the ranch, will yuh?"

"We'll do our best," laughed Hashknife, and went down to the bunk-house, where he found Poco Saunders playing solitaire.

Poco nodded, but kept on with his game.

"Which bunk do I take?" asked Hashknife.

Poco pointed out two unoccupied bunks and began rolling a cigaret. His tobacco sack was almost empty, so Hashknife tossed a full sack in front of him. He nodded his thanks and finished his cigaret. Suddenly he turned and looked straight at Hashknife.

"Do you think that Ben Lanpher killed Smoky Cole?"

Hashknife's face did not change a line, but his eyes squinted a trifle, as he replied—

"What makes yuh think he didn't, Saunders?"

Poco turned back to the table and gathered up the cards.

"I was just wonderin'," he said slowly. "Lanpher was pretty drunk."

"If Ben didn't kill him, who did?" asked Hashknife.

He had asked the same question several times, but no one had given him the slightest clue to show who might have done the murder. And he was doomed to disappointment this time. Poco inhaled deeply and shuffled the cards.

"There was several of that jury that was sore at him," reminded Hashknife.

"Not sore enough to murder him."

"Lotsa folks seem to think that Smoky Cole got what was comin' to him."

"Thasso?" Poco scowled thoughtfully at his cards, and turned slowly, facing Hashknife.

"They say that Smoky wasn't any good, Hartley. He drank and raised — in general every time he got money enough. Smoky was a gunman, and mebbe, accordin' to law, he wasn't just the sweetest little citizen yuh could imagine; but he was my bunkie."

"Me and Smoky shared the same blanket for a long time. We split fifty-fifty on everythin'—me and Smoky did. He might 'a' been an enemy of society, as the judge said at Cassidy's trial, speakin' about criminals, but he was a good friend of mine."

Poco shifted his eyes and looked out through the dusty window, where the last rays of the sunset back-lighted the old cottonwoods beyond the creek, and the lines of his face softened until he was no longer the sinister-looking cowboy.

"He was my bunkie—my pal," he said softly.

"I reckon I understand," said Hashknife slowly. "I've got a bunkie, too, Saunders."

Poco turned and looked at him, as he got slowly to his feet and walked over to the door.

"I know yuh have," said Poco softly, "and—and yuh might tell him to look out."

Hashknife squinted wonderingly, as Poco shut the door behind him.

"What does he know?" wondered Hashknife, half-aloud. "And why does he tell me to warn Sleepy?"

There was no question that Poco Saunders knew something; that he did not believe Ben Lanpher guilty of murder. Hashknife wondered if Poco knew something about the Fantom Riders, who were making inroads on the cattlemen of the Ghost Hills

Range; and was afraid to name them.

"It's too foggy for me to see through," he decided, "so I reckon we'll have to let nature take her course."

Came the musical clanging of the cook's triangle, which announced that supper was ready at the Circle Cross. As Hashknife stepped outside, Poco Saunders was crossing from the barn.

"We'll feed alone t'night," he observed, motioning toward the front porch of the ranch-house.

"Trainor and Buck are both paralyzed drunk."

"Do they make a practise of drinkin' each other to sleep?" asked Hashknife.

"No. Trainor don't drink much, and Buck only cuts loose once a month. Help yourself to a wash-pan."



THE next day, neither Trainor nor Buck Avery was in any shape for active duties. Hashknife asked Trainor what he wanted done, and Trainor was so muddled in the head that he had no coherent ideas. He finally told Hashknife to do what he pleased; so Hashknife saddled his gray bronco and headed into the hills, cutting across toward the Tomahawk.

He wanted to find Sleepy and tell him what Poco Saunders had said; but most of all he wanted to see if Sleepy was all right.

Circle Cross, Tomahawk and Flying M cattle dotted the hills, but the Circle Cross predominated. The feed was fairly good and there seemed plenty of water. It was an ideal range as far as nature was concerned.

As he swung higher into the hills he could see the town of Wolf Wells, a blur of buildings in the swale-like little valley, and beyond that drifted the smoke of a train. There was little color in the hills. Even the foliage of the few trees was of a gray tint that blended into the gray of the forbidding-looking hills.

"Ghost Hills is the right name for 'em," he told his horse, as he swung along a hogback, which led to the little valley of the Tomahawk ranch.

He found Sleepy humped up in the doorway of the ranch-house, trying to coax a tune out of a one-string mandolin, while Lorna leaned against the wall and smiled at his serious efforts.

"Hyah, cowboy!" yelled Sleepy. "By gosh, I'm glad for to see yuh. Git down and

listen to the 'Cowboy's Lament,' done to a turn on one string."

Hashknife dismounted and came up to the doorway. Lorna nodded to him, but it was plainly evident that he was not exactly welcome, and he blamed it to the fact that he was working for the Circle Cross. Mrs. Cassidy came to the door, bobbed her head and went back to her work.

"Here, you play it, Lorna," Sleepy handed her the mandolin, and grinned at Hashknife. "She can play it, too."

But Lorna did not seem disposed to exhibit her musical ability. She took the instrument and went into the house.

"Callin' her by her first name already, eh?" chided Hashknife seriously.

Sleepy blushed and rubbed his stubbled chin.

"Well, there ain't no harm in that, is there?"

"No-o-o, I s'pose not. Lemme tell yuh somethin', cowboy."

And in a few words, Hashknife repeated what Poco Saunders had said.

"What do yuh reckon he meant?" asked Sleepy. "Look out for what?"

"Just that, and no more, Sleepy. I tell yuh, they're on to us and Poco knows it."

"Yeah, and Poco's probably one of the gang."

"If he is, why should he warn us?"

Sleepy shook his head violently.

"That's what I hate about this — country, Hashknife. They're all too scared to talk. But I found out that the Tomahawk has lost a lot of stock. And old Cassidy never killed that detective, no more than I did. There's a bad, bad gang back in these hills, cowboy; and they swoop out and strike hard at anybody that horns into their business."

"Want to pick up and drift out?" queried Hashknife.

Sleepy glanced back at the doorway and shook his head.

"No more than you do, Hashknife. We'll strike a lead pretty soon. I tried to pump the half-breed puncher, but he's close-mouthed like all Injuns. Mebbe he don't know any more than we do, but he's scared to talk."

"Suppose we take a ride into the hills," suggested Hashknife. "We'll kinda look around and see what we can see."

"That's a pious idea," agreed Sleepy. "I'll get my horse."

Lorna stood in the doorway and watched them ride away. Sleepy waved at her, but she made no move to show that she had seen him.

"Yo're free, white and twenty-one," said Hashknife, "but you ain't above takin friendly advice, are yuh, Sleepy?"

"Well, I ain't makin' love to her—if that's what yuh mean."

"Yuh don't have to make love, cowboy. It's already made. Do yuh know what I mean?"

"Yore advice is accepted," grinned Sleepy. "Let's forget the female end of this proposition."

They rode straight back to the main divide of the Ghost Hills, and swung in a wide circle. It was a wild range, where an army might be able to hide without fear of detection. They found two deserted old cabins, windowless and doorless, where the range horses sought shelter from the flies; but there were no other signs of human habitation.

It was nearly sundown when they came back to the Tomahawk. Jimmy, the half-breed, was there and greeted them with a grin. Hashknife did not dismount, but rode back to the Circle Cross, where he found supper on the table, Buck half-drunk again and Trainor swearing at his sore foot. Poco was eating supper.

Buck was just drunk enough to be quarrelsome, and insisted that he was going down to meet the Lanpher family, or as many of them as were coming that night.

Trainor was just as emphatic in telling Buck that he was seven kinds of a fool to even think he was. Trainor appealed to Hashknife.

"He'd be a fine lookin' thing to meet the owner of this ranch, wouldn't he? Wouldn't Mrs. Lanpher and Helen appreciate havin' him meet 'em, Hartley?"

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "I dunno them folks, but I reckon yo're right."

Buck exploded with protestations that he was as sober as a judge, and called upon Poco to look upon him and see if he—Buck—wasn't fit to meet a king and queen.

But Poco refused to be drawn into the argument and Buck subsided in a chair, where he began to snore.

"I don't like to ask it of yuh, Hartley," said Trainor, "but would yuh mind meetin' them folks and bringin' 'em out here? They'll be in about nine o'clock tonight,

if the train is on time, which it probably won't be.

"You can get a two-seated hack at the livery-stable and lead your horse back. Yuh won't be able to miss 'em, 'cause we don't have many strangers come into Wolf Wells."

"Sure, I'll go after 'em, Trainor. As soon as I get through eatin' a bit of supper, I'll go right down-town."

"Take yore time, Hartley. I'm goin' to bed right now. This danged foot is givin' me thunder tonight, and I drank too much last night. Feller's a fool to drink whisky."

Hashknife sat down across from Poco and accepted of Quong's culinary art. He had not eaten since breakfast, and the fat Celestial grinned with delight as Hashknife stowed away great quantities of food.

"Belly good," observed Quong, "Cook plenty—nobody eat. Too much whisky, yo' sabe? Yo' eat good, I'm ve'y glad."

"Then I'll make yuh glad a lot of times," laughed Hashknife

 HASHKNIFE took his time, and it was growing dark when he mounted his gray bronco and headed for Wolf Wells. Just before he reached the forks of the road he saw a rider pass, going toward town.

It was a little too far for identification, but he noted that the man was riding a gray or a grayish-roan horse. The rider had disappeared when Hashknife reached the main road, and he made no effort to overtake him.

The air was cool and Hashknife had plenty of time to go to town and arrange for the livery-rig before train-time. He was riding slowly, scanning the road, near the spot where Ben Lanpher's gun had been found, when the whip-like report of a rifle sounded from left.

Hashknife's horse swerved quickly, and for a moment Hashknife thought the shot had been fired at him, but there had been no sound from a bullet. He dropped off his horse, drew his six-shooter and led the horse down the road.

There were no more shots. The fringe of timber and brush along the road masked him from the hillside, but also precluded any chance of his seeing the shooter.

He led his horse around the first turn and stopped short. Almost at the same spot where Smoky Cole had been killed stood a man and a horse. The man appeared to

be leaning against the horse, as if bracing himself, but when he saw Hashknife he threw up a six-shooter and fired.

Hashknife instinctively ducked, but the bullet hummed off through the brush ten feet away, and the man mounted swiftly although awkwardly and raced down the road.

Hashknife threw up his gun, but snapped it back into its holster, as he mounted swiftly and spurred after the rider.

He knew the speed of his gray horse, and felt sure that he could run his quarry down, if they kept to the road.

"Left handed son-of-a-gun!" snorted Hashknife. "Can't shoot straight, that's a cinch. C'mon, bronc!"

They whirled out into the more open country and Hashknife grinned to see that the rider was still traveling down the road. But the horse ahead, even with its long handicap start, was no match for the long-legged gray, which cut down its lead at every stride.

The rider looked wildly back and even turned in his saddle and tried to get into position for another shot, but, as the running gray horse drew closer, he jerked up on his reins and threw up his hands in token of surrender.

"Don't shoot!" he called, and Hashknife squinted through a cloud of dust at the face of Jimmy, the half-breed.

Hashknife moved in closer and noticed that Jimmy's right arm was bleeding badly.

"That's why yuh shot left-handed, eh?" panted Hashknife.

"Yeah," Jimmy nodded quickly. "Other arm no good."

"Who shot yuh?"

Jimmy squinted at Hashknife and licked his lips.

"You don't shoot me?" he asked.

"No. I heard the shot. Then you shot at me?"

Jimmy nodded and felt of his arm tenderly.

"I thought you shoot me, but I guess not. You can't be two place same time. Who shoot me, you s'pose?"

"Hard to tell, Jimmy. Is your arm hurt bad?"

"Pretty bad. Almost knock me off horse."

He rolled up his sleeve and they examined the wound. The bullet had struck near the wrist and had cut a furrow almost to the

elbow. It was a painful, but not a serious wound; and Hashknife bound it up with a big handkerchief.

"How in thunder did yuh get hit in that arm?" queried Hashknife. "The shot came from the left-side of the road."

"I dunno," said Jimmy blankly. "I reach up to rub my nose, I think."

"By gosh, that was close!" exploded Hashknife, "that bullet must 'a' passed close to yore chin, hooked into yore wrist and kicked loose at your elbow. Now, who in — wants to kill you, Jimmy?"

Jimmy's eyes were troubled as he thought deeply, but his answer was not at all evasive:

"I dunno. I never hurt nobody."

"All right, Jimmy; let's be driftin'."

"I go after coffee," explained Jimmy. "Lorna want coffee for Sleepy."

Hashknife grinned widely, as they rode on, but deep in his heart he was afraid that Sleepy might fall in love with this half-breed girl. But he forgot that as he studied Jimmy and his grayish-roan horse.

It would have been easy to mistake them in that light for himself and the gray horse, he reflected. Were the Fantom Riders aware that he and Sleepy were trying to smoke them out, and were trying to ambush them?

If that were the case, they would get them sooner or later. Hashknife shuddered slightly. He was convinced that they had mistaken their man and had injured Jimmy. There was no way to guard against an ambush. They would likely try another place next time. He turned to Jimmy.

"You better see a doctor about that arm, Jimmy. I'll pay the bill."

"No," Jimmy shook his head quickly. "I go back and let Minnie fix it. She know how."

"Minnie is Mrs. Cassidy, ain't she?"

"Yeah."

"Are you and Lorna related?"

"— no! My mother and Minnie sisters, thasall."

Hashknife grinned, but did not try to explain that Jimmy and Lorna were cousins. Anyway, it would mean nothing to Jimmy.

Hashknife left Jimmy at the general store and went to arrange for the livery-rig. He knew that Jimmy would not discuss the shooting with any one. Coming back from the livery-stable he found the sheriff at his office.

"Lanpher's comin', eh? said the sheriff, after Hashknife had spoken of meeting him at the depot.

"The rest of the family comin'?"

"I dunno. The telegram didn't say, but Trainor talks like they was all comin'."

"I kinda feel sorry for them folks," mused the sheriff. "I like Lanpher. Never did get acquainted with his wife and daughter. I reckon I'll go over with yuh and meet 'em."

Contrary to predictions the train was on time. Lanpher, his wife and daughter were all there, with innumerable bags and suitcases. Hashknife was lucky enough to reach Lanpher first, and gave him the whispered warning—

"Remember, you don't know me."

Then came the sheriff, hand outstretched.

"Glad to meetcha ag'in, Lanpher; but not under these circumstances."

Lanpher shook hands with him, and asked—

"Can we see Ben?"

"Sure thing, yuh can. He don't know yo're comin', but I'll bet he'll be glad to see yuh all. Hartley'll take care of yore things."

Hashknife was glad to get them out of his way, while he loaded the baggage. He drove the team down to the sheriff's office and waited for them to finish their visit. They were in there quite a while, and had nothing to say when they climbed into the two-seater and headed for the ranch.

Lanpher rode with Hashknife on the front seat, and after they were out of the town he asked—

"Well, what have you found out, Hartley?"

"We've found out that a man's life ain't worth a plugged dime, Lanpher. As far as the rustlers are concerned, they're as safe as ever. We can't find out a thing. I'm with the Circle Cross and Sleepy is with the Tomahawk; but we'll both be cowboy angels pretty soon, I reckon."

"But they do not know what you are doing here," protested Lanpher.

"Don't they? That's fine," Hashknife laughed softly. "There's been a leak somewhere, Lanpher. They sure do know us. You didn't wire anybody, did yuh?"

"No, I did not. I was willing to let you two run this to suit yourselves, Hartley. I wired Trainor that we were coming, but that is the only wire I have sent him since you were at my home."

"It's sure got me fightin' my head," admitted Hashknife.

"What do you make of the case against Ben?"

"Well, it looks to me like another Fantom Rider deal, and Ben accidentally happens along and gets the blame for it. He didn't kill Smoky Cole."

"I want to thank you for that," said Mrs. Lanpher brokenly. "It is good to think that some one besides us believe him innocent."

"Cassidy is very bitter," said Lanpher, after a long pause. "He cursed me in the jail a while ago. He seemes to blame me for what has happened to him, but I had nothing to do with it. The sheriff told me that Trainor was crippled."

"Yeah, I forgot to tell yuh that. A horse stepped on him."

"Too bad. What do you think of the Circle Cross?"

"Dunno yet. Looks like a rich ranch."

"Rich! Say, you'd be surprized to know what that ranch has already cost me, Hartley. I'd sell out in a minute, if I could get back what I've spent on it."

"I'll betcha. Hills are pretty tonight, ain't they?"

They drove up to the ranch-house and Trainor hobbled out to meet them, with the aid of a cane. Hashknife unloaded the baggage and placed it on the porch, while they went into the house.

Then he drove to the barn, unhitched the horses, stabled them and went to the bunk-house where he found Buck and Poco snoring a duet. Buck had a half-empty whisky-bottle on a chair beside his bunk, and one of his boots had been placed upside down over a bunk-post.

Hashknife rolled a cigaret and sat down on the edge of his bunk to remove his boots. Poco stirred, sat up, his eyes filled with sleep. He squinted at Hashknife, grunted a hoarse greeting and slumped back on to his pillow. One of Poco's hands was exposed and Hashknife noticed that there was a circle of whang-leather around his wrist. He looked closer, when he saw that a leather thong ran from the wrist under the blanket, and was drawn taut.

Poco's cartridge belt was hanging from the bunk-post, and over this was hung a coat, but when Hashknife crossed to the table to light his cigaret from over the chimney of the oil-lamp, he was able to see that the holster was empty.

Hashknife went back, undressed and blew out the lamp. He sat on the edge of the bunk for a long time, but finally crawled between the blankets and placed his six-shooter under the blanket beside him.

"Poco is scared of somethin'," mused Hashknife. "He's got his six-gun linked to him—and a feller don't anchor himself to a thing like that to keep from fallin' out of bed. Dang him, I'd like to trade talk with him. But I reckon he's scared like everybody else—and me included."



"BUCK is goin' over to the Flyin' M to see old man Shappee for me, and Poco is goin' to drive an extra team to town; so we can get rid of this livery-outfit. You can go with Buck, if yuh want to, or yuh can stay here and see what yuh can do about fixin' up the fence of the brandin' corral."

Trainor had hobbled down to the barn, with the aid of a cane; and was talking with Hashknife while Poco and Buck harnessed the teams.

"Well, yo're the boss," smiled Hashknife. "I'll go with Buck if yuh say so; but it don't take two men to pack a message. Mebbe I better fix up that fence."

"Whatever yuh want to do, Hartley. Mr. and Mrs. Lanpher want to go down and see Ben; so I'll go with 'em. Miss Lanpher has a bad headache and will stay home."

"All right, I'll stay here and help Quong run the ranch."

Poco drove away with the ranch-wagon, while Buck drove up to the house with the livery-rig, picked up the Lanphers and Trainor and drove away.

Hashknife secured a hammer and nails and worked on the corral for a time; but Hashknife was no carpenter and the work palled. Anyway, it was too hot to work. He went back and sat down in the shade of the bunk-house. Somehow, he felt much safer with a solid wall at his back.

Miss Lanpher came out on the ranch-house porch and sat down with a magazine. She glanced idly through it for a while, but put it aside and looked around.

Hashknife got up and walked to the porch.

"Mornin', Miss Lanpher. How's the headache?"

She looked at him closely, frowned slightly and said—

"I do not believe I have ever met you."

"Yes'm, yuh have," he smiled. "Me and Sleepy was at your house in Frisco not long ago. Yore pa introduced us."

"Perhaps," she nodded coldly, "but I do not remember you. Are you one of the cowboys?"

"Well," Hashknife scratched his head thoughtfully, "yuh might brand me as such. I brought yuh in from Wolf Wells last night, if yuh remember."

"Oh, you were the driver."

She picked up the magazine and opened it before she looked at him and said—

"Is there something I can do for you?"

Hashknife's smile faded and he studied her for a moment.

"Yes'm, I was just kinda wonderin', don'tcha know it?"

"Well?" Icily.

"Just kinda wonderin' if it's the fogs that make Frisco folks so chilly."

She looked questioningly at him, as if at a loss to know what he meant; but he merely turned, put on his hat and walked back toward the bunk-house.

"That was a — mean thing to say," he chuckled to himself. "But she's prob'ly so high-toned that she'd have to have it explained to her."

He went back to the corral and spent the rest of the morning hammering lustily. The ringing of the triangle, as Quong announced the mid-day meal, caused him to hang up his hammer and admire the collection of bruises he had acquired.

Quong was standing just outside the kitchen, fanning himself with a towel as Hashknife came striding across the yard, heading for the wash-bench.

Suddenly he jolted hard in his stride and jerked sidewise. An angry bee had buzzed past his head, or what had seemed to be a whizzer of some sort; but the buzz was punctuated by a loud—

Whap!

Quong dropped his towel and jerked away, staring wildly at the door-casing behind him, where a bullet had drilled a neat hole.

"Zee-e-e-e—blam!"

Then came the thin, far-away crack of a rifle. Quong fairly fell into the kitchen, and Hashknife was right on his heels.

The second bullet had gone in through the doorway and had torn a gaping hole in Quong's big copper kettle on the stove,

and the soup was spewing out all over the hot griddles.

The room was filled with steam and odors of burning grease, plentifully mixed with Celestial chatter that might be oaths or prayers.

Hashknife grasped a cloth and managed to fling the kettle outside. Miss Lanpher came to the door from the dining-room, wondering at the turmoil. She stared around, and Quong caught sight of her. He immediately began bombarding her with pidgin-English, but Hashknife stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Quong," and then to Miss Lanpher—

"Miss Lanpher, this is Quong, the cook. Quong, this is Miss Lanpher."

Hashknife stepped gracefully back and motioned for Quong to continue, but Quong had forgotten what to say, and turned back to his stove.

Miss Lanpher looked coldly at Hashknife and her eyebrows lifted a trifle, as she said:

"That was very thoughtful of you, I am sure. But I have known Quong a long time. I was here several weeks about a year ago."

"Oh, yeah. Well, it was my mistake, ma'am."

"Now, what happened in here, Mr. Hartley?"

"Well, Miss Lanpher; somebody took two shots at the cook and ventilated the soup-pot. Nothin' serious."

"Took a shot at the cook?" she gasped. "Why—why how ridiculous!"

"Yes'm, I s'pose it was. Missed him both times, too."

She called to Quong and he stopped wiping the stove long enough to turn his head.

"Quong, did somebody shoot at you?"

He looked fearfully toward the door and nodded violently.

"Yessash, two time. I go way bimeby. Too — much shoot fo' me. Soup all gone; kittle busted. —'s bells!"

"Quong!"

Hashknife laughed and went to the door, where he managed to retrieve the punctured kettle with a broom-handle. He dumped out the soup-bone, and with it came a battered piece of lead—the badly mushroomed bullet that had busted up Quong's soup.

Hashknife examined it closely and showed it to Quong.

"Looks like a thirty-thirty, Quong."

Calibers meant nothing in Quong's life, but he realized what that bullet would have done to him. Hashknife showed it to Miss Lanpher, but it failed to excite her in the least.

"Who would shoot at Quong?" she asked, as if she did not believe it at all.

Quong turned quickly, a grin on his fat face.

"Mebbyso accidnt. Somebody shoot clyote—bullet come heah. What you t'ink?"

"Now that's fine," laughed Hashknife. "I'll betcha that's it, Quong. Too bad it busted the kettle."

"You mean that they were shooting at something else and the bullet accidentally came down here?" Thus Miss Lanpher, credulously.

"There's a lot of coyotes in the hills," said Hashknife, evading the direct question.

"There's some wolves and a lot of polecats, too, ma'am. I wish—say, Quong; has Trainor got a rifle here in the house?"

"Yessah. One rifle in room. I show you."

Quong trotted out and came back in a minute with a Winchester 45-70, which he handed to Hashknife, but Hashknife told him to take it back.

He had thought of going out into the hills and try to find the man who had fired the two shots, but decided that it would be a hopeless search.

Hashknife also knew that those shots were fired at him and not at the Chinese cook. He had been in line with Quong, who was in the shade and probably not visible to the man behind the rifle. From the reports of the gun, the man was shooting at extreme long range—and shooting only too well to suit Hashknife.

"They'll be dynamitin' the bunk-house next," mused Hashknife to himself, as Quong prepared the meal. "I've been lucky so far—but can it last?"

Miss Lanpher had retired to the front of the house, so Hashknife ate alone.



IT WAS in the middle of the afternoon when Trainor, Mr. and Mrs. Lanpher and Poco Saunders came back from town. Hashknife did not go up to the house, but helped Poco unhitch the team. Poco was as uncommunicative as ever.

As they came out of the stable, Trainor was hobbling toward them, but stopped and called to Hashknife—

"What's this I hear about somebody shootin' at Quong?"

"Oh, that," Hashknife laughed and looked back toward the hills, "I reckon somebody was shootin' at coyotes. They came darn near hittin' the Chinaman, though. Lotsa folks are careless thataway."

"Uu-huh," Trainor grunted his unbelief. "Shootin' kinda high, wasn't they, Hartley?"

"Kinda."

"Say, do you really think they were shootin' at coyotes?"

"Well," smiled Hashknife, "that's all a matter of opinion. Mebbe the shooter felt thataway about it."

"Uh-huh, I see what yuh mean."

Trainor turned and went back to the house. Poco Saunders had heard the conversation, and now he turned and went into the bunk-house ahead of Hashknife, who shut the door and faced him.

Poco's eyes narrowed, but he feigned not to notice Hashknife's steady gaze. Finally Hashknife said—

"Poco, I'll trade talk with yuh."

"Trade talk?" Poco did not seem to understand.

"Yeah. I was shot at twice this afternoon."

"I had nothin' to do with that, Hartley."

"Why do yuh tie yore gun to yuh at night, Poco?"

Poco started slightly, but his face did not betray that he was caught off his guard.

"Yore bunkie was shot from ambush, Poco," continued Hashknife. "Are you afraid of the same thing?"

Poco studied the question thoughtfully.

"Why should I be afraid?" he asked.

"I asked to trade talk—not to answer questions."

"Why should I trade talk? I know nothin'."

"All right."

Hashknife turned to his bunk, but stopped.

"Why did Pinto Cassidy draw a dead-line between his place and the Circle Cross?"

"I don't know," replied Poco; and Hashknife felt that he was telling the truth.

"Are yuh afraid to talk about the rustlers who have been stealing stock on this range, Poco?"

"Why talk about 'em?"

"Well, for one reason is this—they've killed three men from ambush already."

"Three? You don't think that Ben Lanpher killed——"

Hashknife shook his head.

"Last night Jimmy, the half-breed, was shot in the arm, at the same spot where Smoky Cole was killed."

"He was?" Poco squinted thoughtfully, and Hashknife noticed that Poco's knuckles were white from their grip on his belt.

"Now, will yuh trade talk with me, Poco?"

But Poco shook his head slowly, his teeth shut tight.

"No, I can't trade a talk, because I know nothin'."

As Hashknife turned away, Buck Avery came in. He was half-drunk and was carrying a bottle in his hand, which he put under his pillow.

"Hyah, cowboys!" he greeted them. "Help yourself to the liquor. Reg'lar old poultry cocktail, that is. Six drinks and yuh lay. Hartley, yuh old son-of-a-gun, don't yuh never drink anythin'?"

But before Hashknife could reply, Trainor came to the door.

"Did you see old man Shappee, Buck?" he asked.

"Yeah; be right with yuh, Jim."

Buck kicked off his chaps, joined Trainor and they went toward the house together.

"Buck's drinkin' too much," observed Poco. "He can't let it alone when he starts once. Trainor knows that, and he was a — fool to start Buck off the other night."

"Trainor ain't picked another foreman yet, has he?" asked Hashknife casually.

"Nope. Prob'ly pick Buck, though. Buck has been with him ever since he took over the Circle Cross. Smoky and Buck came here together."

"How long you been here, Poco?"

"'Bout a year. Me and Smoky worked together before."

"Well, I'm not goin' to stay a year," laughed Hashknife. "There's too much promiscuous shootin' goin' on around here to suit me. Everybody's scared to talk for fear they're talkin' to the person who is doin' all the dirty work. It's a — of a country, thasall."

"Yeah," nodded Poco solemnly. "I reckon that about describes it, Hartley."

Hashknife went outside and sat down on

a bench beside the door. Buck was near the kitchen door, busy at the wash-bench and talking to Quong who was standing in the doorway. Miss Lanpher was out in the front yard, looking at a stunted rose-bush, and Trainor was walking out to her.

She looked up, as he drew closer and seemed to be talking to her. For a few moments she listened to him; and then walked past him and into the house.

"He got froze up, too," chuckled Hashknife aloud.

"He sure did," agreed Poco, who had come to the door and noticed it.

"He's stuck on her pretty bad, I reckon. Anyway, he was kinda hard hit when she turned him down. I don't see nothin' to her m'self. Too danged high-toned. Trainor's a lot older than she is, and he ain't so — handsome either."

"If she wants beauty I might stand a chance," laughed Hashknife.

"Yuh can't any more than get turned down."

"I've had mine, Poco."

Trainor walked around to the kitchen door and began talking to Buck, who threw his wash-pan of dirty water out on to the ground and slammed the pan viciously onto the bench.

They both seemed angry, but talked in low tones. Finally Buck whirled and came toward the bunk-house, swearing to himself. As he came up to the door he looked back toward the house, where Trainor was standing, looking toward them.

"I'll drink when and where I — please!" snarled Buck, and went into the bunk-house, where he piled up on his bed and went to sleep.

That Buck had no respect for Trainor's authority was attested by the fact that Buck drank at intervals all night, and dug a fresh quart of liquor from beneath his straw tick the next morning.

He was incoherent in everything, except profanity, and refused to answer the breakfast call. Trainor's foot was much better, and he was jovial at breakfast.

"Hartley, you will go with Lanpher and me today. We're goin' to look over the range. Poco will drive the ladies to town."

"Somebody ought to stay with Buck," said Hashknife. "He's in bad shape."

"Let him sleep it off!" grated Trainor. "The fool won't let whisky alone; so he's the one to suffer."

They saddled their horses after breakfast and rode into the hills. Lanpher was unused to the saddle and knew little about riding, which handicapped them as far as speed was concerned.

They rode northeast almost to the main divide and swung around through the breaks, giving Lanpher some idea of what he owned. He had little to say, except in an undertone to Trainor. In fact, most of their conversation was handled in such a way that Hashknife was excluded.

Hashknife kept his eyes open and studied the country. On this side of the range there were few cattle of any brand, although there was plenty of water and feed. Hashknife remarked about it, but Trainor merely nodded and did not reply.

Lanpher looked queerly at Hashknife, as much as to say—

"You know the reason well enough."

Trainor had tied a lunch to the back of his saddle, and they ate at a spring far back in the hills. During the course of the lunch, Lanpher remarked—

"Carsten was in to see me not long ago, Jim."

"That so?"

"Yes. Just a friendly call, he said; but wanted to know what we had that was for sale."

"What did you tell him?"

"Well, I told him I didn't know. He said that beef was due to take a raise pretty soon. I'm not kicking on prices."

"No." Trainor shook his head. "We have no kick on the price of beef and hides."

They finished their lunch and mounted again. Hashknife grinned as Lanpher settled himself tenderly in the saddle and braced his feet solidly in the stirrups.

It was almost dark when they arrived at the ranch-house. Lanpher was thoroughly tired so Hashknife took care of the horse for him. Poco had just fed the wagon-team and told Hashknife that they had just arrived a short time before.

"What's new in Wolf Wells?" asked Hashknife.

"Nothin' much. I seen your pardner and the half-breed girl down there about noon. He's workin' at the Tomahawk, ain't he?"

"Well, I dunno about the work part of it," laughed Hashknife, as they entered the bunk-house.

Buck was still stretched out on the bunk

and an empty bottle attested to the fact that Buck was "full as a tick." Poco tried to rouse him, but Buck refused to give more than a grunt.

Trainor ate supper with Hashknife and Poco, after the Lanpher family had eaten, and during the meal the sheriff and Lonesome Hobbs rode in. Hashknife saw them from the window, but said nothing. They dismounted and went to the front of the house.

"What's comin' off around here?" wondered Hashknife, as he saw three more riders ride down past the house and tie their horses to a corral fence.

He recognized one of them as being Ability Edwards. Trainor saw them, too, and hurriedly finished the rest of his meal. After he went out, Hashknife said to Poco:

"The sheriff and deputy came a few minutes ago, and just now, three more men rode in. What do yuh make of it?"

Poco halted with a cup at his lips, slowly placed it back in the saucer and got to his feet. He went to the door and looked out. Hashknife got up and went over to him.

The men had grouped a short distance from the porch and were talking as they looked down the road toward town. In a few moments three more riders appeared.

"That's Jud Carey, Bert Elhoff and Honey Simpson, all from the 66 outfit," said Poco. "Them first three are old man Shappee, Bility Edwards and Baldy Shannon, from the Flyin' M. I wonder what it means."

"Let's horn in and find out," grinned Hashknife.

The three riders dismounted and joined the group.

"Well, I reckon we're all here," observed Trainor, "so we might as well go into the house."

He led the way into the living-room and the men sat down on the chairs, or squatted on their heels against the wall. Lanpher had joined them at the door. Trainor glanced around at the group, but said nothing to Poco and Hashknife, who had invited themselves.

"Gentlemen," said Trainor seriously, "I reckon you all know why yo're here this evenin'. We've all suffered alike in this matter, and I think the time has come when we will have to step out into the open."

"Mr. Lanpher—" Trainor indicated him—"I reckon most of yuh met him when

he was here before, and yuh know he is half-owner of the Circle Cross. He advised me to have yuh meet here and try to figure out some way to handle this proposition.

"I know how yuh feel about it. We've all been afraid to talk about it—or to do much. But I'll tell yuh it's comin' to a showdown. I don't mind tellin' yuh that the two men of mine that were killed were detectives; sent here by the association.

"Whether or not Smoky Cole was killed by the same gang, we don't know. I hope it can be proved on 'em. Yesterday two shots were fired from back there in the hills. One of 'em hit the casing of the kitchen door, while the other went into the kitchen and smashed into a kettle. Hartley, over there, was going toward the door at the time, and my cook was beside the doorway. I don't know which they were trying to kill."

The cattlemen considered this, as they looked at Hashknife and at each other. Old man Shappee, a typical old cattleman, cleared his throat raspingly.

"What did you ever do to 'em, Hartley?" he asked.

"It was kinda hard to tell—at that distance," grinned Hashknife, and the men smiled with him.

"Now, who has an idea to work on?" asked Trainor.

The men stirred uneasily. None of them seemed to want to commit themselves. Finally Jud Carey, a lanky, middle-aged man stood up.

"I dunno how anybody could figure out an idea," he drawled slowly. "It ain't like buckin' somethin' that yuh can see, Jim. The 66 has lost a lot of stock, but none of us has been shot at—yet."

He sat down slowly and lighted a cigaret.

"Aw, ——!" exploded Trainor. "Is everybody afraid to talk? Are we goin' to set here and shiver in our boots while a gang of bushwackin' rustlers shoot our men from ambush and run off our stock?"

"All right—tell us what to do," suggested Shappee.

"Well," Trainor hesitated, "I'm ——ed if I know what to do. Lanpher and I have done what we think is the best thing; but we can't ask the association to send more men to the slaughter."

"How did this gang find out that they were detectives?" asked Bility Edwards.

"Nobody knows."

"They're sure a slick outfit," observed

the sheriff. "I didn't know that these men were detectives. Nobody ever told me about 'em. One was killed near town and the other one on the Tomahawk ranch. It's almost a cinch that old Cassidy didn't kill both of 'em."

"Cassidy's a salty old son-of-a-gun, but I'll bet he never killed that feller," said Shappee, but qualified his statement with—

"Unless he's one of the gang himself."

"And that's what we don't know," said Trainor.

"Would it do you any good to make up a big posse and hunt every inch of the hills?" asked the sheriff.

"How would we know but what the men we're lookin' for would be ridin' along with us?" asked Carey.

"I dunno," said the sheriff foolishly.

"Well, anythin' is better than settin' around and bein' shot at, I should think," observed Shappee. "I'm ready to ride or do anythin' the majority wants to do."

"I wish I knew what to suggest." Thus William Lanpher, who had been a good listener.

"I have spent money for investigators, who have been killed. This is very unfortunate. I do not know how much stock you men have lost, but I do know that we have suffered severely. And, gentlemen, it is not going to stop, unless we are able to stop it."

"Yuh can't expect 'em to draw out of a cinch game, can yuh?" queried Bility Edwards.

"Why would they kill Smoky Cole?" demanded Lonesome, who had hardly spoken since he arrived.

"Smoky wasn't no detective."

"We don't know that they did," said Trainor, "but we hope it can be laid to their door so as to clear Ben Lanpher of the charge."

"——, he was too drunk to bushwhack anybody that day," declared Lonesome. "I reckon they done it."

"They're promiscuous all right," agreed Hashknife heartily. "Night before last they shot Jimmy Droop-drawers, the Tomahawk half-breed, while he was ridin' along the same place that Smoky Cole was killed."

"For gosh sake!" exploded Shappee, while the rest of them grunted or cursed in astonishment.

"You didn't tell me about this," said Trainor seriously.

Hashknife shook his head.

"No, I thought yuh had troubles enough, Trainor."

"Nobody told me," complained the sheriff. "Was he hurt much?"

Hashknife explained the extent of his injuries.

"And why did they try to kill the breed?" queried Lonesome dismally.

"My —, why don'tcha do somethin', except ask questions?" snorted the sheriff.

"Show me anybody that's doin' better than that," replied Lonesome. "I'm askin' — pointed ones, y'betcha."

Lonesome's reply brought a grin, but it was short-lived.

Came the sound of a hurried footstep, the door was flung open and Lorna Cassidy almost fell inside the room. She shut the door behind her and stood with her back against it.

She was hatless, one sleeve of her dress was torn badly. Her hair was wind-blown and one of her long braids was wrapped once around her neck; as though she had ridden fast and far through the wind.

She looked from face to face in that smoke-fogged room, her lips shut tight, her eyes blazing, until she caught sight of Hashknife, and spoke directly to him.

"Your pardner was shot—hour—or—so—ago!" she panted.

Hashknife sprang to his feet, as did the rest of the men.

"My pardner—Sleepy. Shot? Not dead?"

She shook her head, her eyes still searching the room.

"No, not dead; hurt bad."

Hashknife went to her and took her by the arm.

"Don't hurry," he advised her hoarsely. "Take yore time and tell us all about it."

She nodded, leaning against the door, as she looked from face to face. She appeared to be looking for some one.

"We were out riding," she said slowly. "We had been to town and when we were coming back we decided to take a ride into the hills.

"We saw a man riding alone, but paid no attention to him. As we were riding down to our ranch, a shot was fired and my horse fell. I hurt my head a little, and before I could get up another shot was fired and Sleepy fell off his horse.

"I got him to the house and—" she shook

her head wearily— "My mother helped me. She heard the shots, too."

"But how bad is he hurt?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't know. The bullet struck him under the left arm and knocked him off the horse. He didn't know anything for a while, but he woke up all right."

"How long ago did this happen?" asked Trainor.

"Oh, I don't know. It was a while before dark."

"And he hasn't had a doctor?" queried Hashknife.

Lorna shook her head.

"My mother is better than a doctor. She knows what to do. He knew I came over to tell you, and he said to tell you that he's all right."

"And you didn't see the man that fired the shots?" said the sheriff.

Lorna looked around the circle again and back at the sheriff.

"Yes, I seen him."

"Yuh did? My gosh! Who was he?"

"I got up, after my horse fell with me, I was dizzy for a minute, but I looked back toward the hill and I seen the man riding away. It was the same man we saw a while before."

"But who was he?" urged half-a-dozen voices, as the cattlemen crowded around her.

"Give us his name," demanded the sheriff.

But Lorna shook her head.

"No, not yet."

"Why not?"

"I told Sleepy about it and he said for me to not tell anybody."

"Well, that's a — of a note!" wailed Lonesome.

Hashknife smiled grimly. He knew that Sleepy, even though badly hurt, knew that this information would be for them alone.

"You want to be party to a crime?" queried the sheriff. "If yuh don't tell, yo're as guilty as the shooter."

Lorna backed against the door and looked defiantly at him.

"All right, arrest me."

"Oh —!"

The sheriff turned appealingly to the men.

"What can yuh do in a case like that?"

Hashknife turned and went out through the kitchen, heading for the barn. He saddled and led his horse outside, where he

found the cattlemen waiting for him. Poco brushed past him, saying that he and Trainor were going along.

Lorna was already in the saddle; so he rode in beside her and they led the way. There was little conversation. Every man felt that they would soon know the name of the man who had been terrorizing the Ghost Hills Range, and they also knew that he would never live to be tried by a court of law.

Hashknife did not question Lorna, and he felt that these men would have their ride in vain. If Sleepy did not want her to tell the name of the killer, it was because this information might serve them to uncover the whole band.

Near the forks of the road he asked if it might not be well to send one man after the doctor at Wolf Wells, but she said:

"My mother good doctor. She knows what to do."

Hashknife knew that many of the Indians were adept at treating gunshot wounds, and a rangeland doctor is not usually a surgeon; so he agreed that her idea was probably the best.

It was a silent group of riders that dismounted at the open door of the Tomahawk ranch-house and filed inside. Sleepy was stretched out on a cot and beside him sat the Indian woman, Mrs. Cassidy.

Sleepy was very white, but he grinned at Hashknife and looked around at the crowd.

"Pardner, how do yuh feel?" asked Hashknife softly.

"Fine." Sleepy's voice was weak. "They come danged near handin' me a harp, Hashknife."

"Where did it hit yuh?"

"Kinda under the pit of m' arm and come out over m' chest. It sure ripped —— out of me. I must have cast-iron ribs, 'cause she didn't go inside."

"Then yuh ain't hurt bad." There was a note of relief in Hashknife's voice.

"F'r a minute I thought yuh was dead, cowboy."

"You didn't have nothin' on me. I seen seven flocks of angels flyin' in a V-shape over me. I says to myself, 'Sleepy, yo're goin' to be a migratory bird, instead of a harpist.'"

The sheriff shoved his way to the front and looked down at Sleepy.

"The girl says that yuh know who shot yuh."

Sleepy squinted up at the sheriff in amazement. He turned his head slowly and looked at the ring of faces around him.

"Well, I know that somebody did," he said softly, "but a feller with his face in the dust can't hardly see behind him and up a hill."

"But you seen the same feller before to-day," persisted the sheriff. "By ——, we want to know who it was!"

"So do I," said Sleepy. "I want to be sure."

"You give us his name and we'll find out for yuh," stated old man Shappee.

Sleepy shook his head and looked appealingly at Hashknife, who turned to the crowd.

"Gents, yuh can't bother him no more now. He's been bad hurt, and he don't want to talk."

The crowd moved back to the doorway and the Indian woman sat down beside Sleepy, giving him a drink of something that had a most peculiar odor.

There was no question but what the cattlemen were not in the best of humor. They had come a long way after information and had not received it.

"I don't understand why they won't talk," said Trainor. "This ain't a thing to keep secret. If the guilty one finds out that they are known, they'll fog out of the country and we'll never see 'em again."

"Well," Lonesome shook his head sadly, "that sure wouldn't hurt my feelin's, none whatever. They can't fog too soon nor too far to suit old man Hobbs' little son."

"—— it!" wailed the sheriff dismally. "What's the good of havin' a sheriff?"

"I've argued the same question many times," smiled Hashknife, "but yuh never can make folks listen to reason. I never seen one yet that was good for anythin', except pitchin' horseshoes."

"What I want to know is this." Jud Carey spat dryly and looked around. "When do we git informed as to who the shooter was?"

"Don't look at me!" snapped the sheriff. "I've asked questions until m' tonsils are all raw. I don't see why they're keepin' this to themselves, danged if I do."

"I reckon there's nothin' to be learned here," said Shappee wearily, "and it's a long ride back to the old Flyin' M. I ain't as young as I used to be."

"Come over and stay with us tonight," offered Trainor.

"Yeah, and have ma pawin' holes in the carpet, 'cause I don't come home. She's scared stiff, jist thinkin' that I might git shot in the back. I told her that at my age it didn't make a — bit of difference whether they shot me in the back or the front. I'm much obliged to yuh, just the same, Trainor."

"You're sure welcome to come," laughed Trainor, and turned to Hashknife.

"You goin' back with us, Hartley?"

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"No, I reckon I'll stay here tonight. Mebbe I'll have to go after a doctor, but I don't think so. Anyway, I'll be over early in the mornin'."

They went back to their horses and rode away down the moonlit highway, which wound in and out of the brushy cañons. Hashknife watched them until they faded out in the distance, and turned back, closing the door behind him.

He crossed the room and drew the blanket curtain across the window near the cot. Lorna had sat down near the fireplace, and a moment later Jimmy, the half-breed, slipped in the front door and closed it quickly.

Jimmy was carrying a shotgun, which he leaned against the wall. The squaw spoke to him in the Sioux tongue and he shook his head.

"Lorna go way, Jimmy watch," volunteered the squaw in explanation.

"See nothin'," grunted Jimmy, coming closer to the cot and grinning at Sleepy.

"You feel good, eh? Minnie — good doctor."

Hashknife walked over and squatted down on his heels beside the cot.

"Yuh want to talk about it, Sleepy?" he asked.

"Ask Lorna."

Lorna came closer and spoke softly.

"It was Buck Avery."

"Buck Avery?"

Hashknife squinted thoughtfully. Buck had been drunk for two days. He was still drinking that morning, and was dead drunk just before supper.

"I'm sorry, but I reckon yuh made a mistake, Lorna," he said slowly, and told them of Buck's drinking.

"I told her not to tell anybody, and I'm glad she didn't," said Sleepy weakly. "It don't pay to be too quick in a thing like that."

Lorna shook her head slowly and stared at the blank wall.

"No talk much," grunted the squaw "— good thing."

"I seen that man," persisted Lorna, as if visualizing him now. "He rode like Buck Avery and he looked like Buck Avery. But this man was not drunk."

"Got me the second shot," grinned Sleepy. "His first one must 'a' just grazed me and hit Lorna's horse in the head. No drunken man fired them two shots."

"Which lets Buck out," declared Hashknife. "He's been drunk ever since I went to the Circle Cross. But this sure puts us in one fine fix. The guilty party will think that we know 'em, and they'll either pull out of the country or try harder to wipe us out."

"Don't worry sick man," advised the squaw. "Go to bed."

"That's good advice," admitted Hashknife, and to Sleepy—

"If that bullet tore yuh up bad, suppose I go after a doctor and have him sew yuh up."

"I fixum," grunted the squaw. "No need doctor."

"That's a cinch," grinned Sleepy. "Mother fixed me up fine. I couldn't be sewed tighter if they used a sewing-machine on me. Don'tcha bother about me, Hashknife; you keep yore own skin together."

Hashknife accepted a blanket from Lorna, kicked off his boots and rolled up in a corner. He was dog-tired, but his mind refused to rest. He wondered who rode and looked like Buck Avery.

Mentally he compared every Ghost Hills cowpuncher that he knew, but none of them looked like Buck. Still, at a distance, there was a similarity between Buck and Honey Simpson, the silent puncher from the 66. Even Bility Edwards might be mistaken for Buck.

But his mind always jerked back to Buck Avery, snoring on the bunk, with the empty bottle beside him and the bunk-house smelling strongly of liquor. Buck was drunk the night that Jimmy, the half-breed, had been shot, and Buck had gone to the Flying M ranch at the time that Quong had nearly been hit.

The Flying M was west of the Circle Cross, while the shots had been fired from the east. Buck had been to Wolf Wells

that day, and had also carried the message to the Flying M for Trainor.

And last, but not least, there was not a .30-30 rifle on the Circle Cross. The bullet that wrecked Quong's kettle was a .30-30. Hashknife had seen Smoky Cole's wound, but it was hard to tell what kind of a bullet had killed him. He wished now that he had examined it more closely.

He resolved to examine the dead horse in the morning and see if he could find the bullet. Lorna was sitting by the fireplace, her chin cupped in her hands and Hashknife studied her profile.

Just beyond her, and to the right, sat her mother, a short, squat, typical Indian woman. He thought of Pinto Cassidy, with his wizened, wrinkled, Irish countenance, and wondered what freak of nature had given these two an offspring like Lorna. She was as unlike either of them as a child could be.

And then he went to sleep to dream of miles of mesquite clumps with a bushwhacker behind each one, and him with a .45-70 rifle and nothing to shoot in it, except .30-30 caliber cartridges.

Just after midnight a severe thunderstorm swept the Ghost Hills, and the downpour of rain thudded hollowly on the roof of the Tomahawk ranch-house; but Hashknife slept the sleep of the just, in spite of it all.

It was barely past daylight when Hashknife awoke and rolled out of his blanket. The old squaw was already preparing breakfast and Sleepy was snoring soundly. Jimmy, the half-breed, put in a yawning appearance, and peered cautiously out of a window.

"Whatcha see?" queried Hashknife.

"I just look," replied Jimmy.

"Uh-huh."

Hashknife rolled a cigaret and turned to the squaw.

"Mother, how's the patient gettin' along?"

She smiled widely and nodded toward the cot.

"He get well now—pretty quick."

"He sure didn't git hit in his snorer," grinned Hashknife, and nodded to Lorna who had just come in.

She walked over, looked at Sleepy, who awoke and grinned up at her.

"How are yuh feelin', cowboy?" asked Hashknife.

"Finer 'n frawg-hair. Gimme a cigaret."

They sat down and discussed the happenings of the evening before, but Lorna still persisted that the man looked exactly like Buck Avery.

"But," argued Hashknife, "Buck has been drunk for several days. He was drunk when we found him yesterday."

"Lorna know Buck pretty good," said Jimmy.

"All right," grinned Hashknife. "If it was Buck, he's headin' out of this country right now. He'd hear that Lorna seen him, and he'd sure fade away fast. But where would Buck fit into the scheme of things?"

No one seemed to have an answer for that question. They ate breakfast and Hashknife announced his intentions of going back to the Circle Cross ranch.

"No — good," declared Jimmy.

"Yuh think they'd bushwhack me, Jimmy?"

"Think plenty now," advised Jimmy.

Hashknife grinned and puffed on his cigaret.

"Mebbe yo're right, Jimmy," he finally agreed. "They'd hate to have me pack information back with me, I reckon. None of 'em know the name that Lorna had in mind, but they'd know danged well that I'd have it now. Mebbe we better try somethin' easy at first."

Hashknife selected an old pair of overalls, an old shirt and a pair of boots. Three blankets sufficed for the stuffing of them. He tied a rope around the dummy under the arms and left a length of rope extending from each side. Then he surmounted the thing with his own hat, fitting it to the roll of blanket which extended up through the neck of the shirt.

"Grab hold of a rope, Jimmy," he ordered, and the half-breed obeyed with a grin.

"Looks more like me than I do," laughed Hashknife as he dragged the dummy over to the door.

"Now, Jimmy, you stand on one side and hold yore rope high and tight enough to make the darned things stand up like a man. Don't expose yourself, young feller. All set?"

Jimmy nodded and drew the rope tight. Hashknife looked back in the room to see that nothing was in line. Then he shoved the door wide open. The dummy looked

like a cowboy. Perhaps it was a trifle limp-looking at close range.

It stood there for perhaps five seconds motionless. Then it jerked convulsively and fell sidewise. From the rear of the room came the splat of a bullet striking wood, and from the hills came the thin pop of a high-power cartridge.

Hashknife reached out and drew the door shut. Jimmy stood there, looking foolishly at a piece of rope in his hand, which had been cleanly severed. It was a rope made from Maguey fiber, about the size of a clothes-line, but very hard and brittle.

"Well," said Hashknife, shoving the dummy aside, "I'll say that it worked to the queen's taste."

The two women were staring wonderingly at him, but Sleepy was laughing joyously. Jimmy crossed the room and poked his finger at the spot where the bullet had bored into the seasoned wall.

"We're sure hived up for keeps," said Sleepy, as if rather pleased at the prospect. Sleepy loved a fight, and nothing pleased him more than to give odds.

"You ain't in it, you doggone cripple," reminded Hashknife. "Yuh don't need to start cheerin' about it."

Jimmy had moved the curtain an inch and was staring out through the window.

"See anythin'?" asked Hashknife.

"Nothin'. They think you dead—mebbe."

"Very likely. But they won't stop at one killin'. They will naturally think that we all know the guilty man, and they'll try to stop all of us. You got a rifle, Jimmy?"

"You —— right!"

Jimmy went into another room and came back with an old .50-90 Sharps, which he handled lovingly before giving it to Hashknife.

"That good gun, you bet."

Hashknife grinned and examined it. He knew the killing power of the old Sharps, even though they did not compare with the high-power rifle. He accepted a handful of cartridges from the half-breed.

"Whatcha goin' to do?" queried Sleepy anxiously.

"I'm goin' into the hills," grinned Hashknife. "I'm goin' to have a perfectly good little fight, and yo're goin' to lay here in yore nice little beddie and wish you was along; sabe?"

"Aw ——! You'll go out there and get

yore danged hide all filled up with soft-nose bullets that's what you'll do. Ain'tcha got no sense, Hashknife?"

"Sour grapes," retorted Hashknife, and to Jimmy—

"Gimme more shells."

Jimmy gave him several more, which Hashknife pocketed. He rescued his hat from the dummy and drew it tightly on his head.

"Now, you folks just set tight, will yuh? I've got to teach them bushwhackers that they ain't got the only rifle in the Ghost Hills. *Adios*. That means good-by in Spanish."

"Thirty-thirty," retorted Sleepy. "That means good-by in any darned language."

Hashknife went to the rear of the house, opened a window as wide as possible, stood up on a chair and fairly dived outside. He landed on his feet, ducked low and ran swiftly toward the upper corral, running in a zigzag angle to confuse any one who might be trying to use him for a target.

He had almost reached the angle of the corral fence when—

Whim-m-m-m!

A bullet tore up the ground almost under his feet and *zee-e-e-e'd* its way up the slope of the hills. It was too close for comfort, and Hashknife was thankful for the protection of a patch of brush behind the corral fence.

"Good shootin'," he panted aloud, as he crawled like a snake fifty feet from where he had dropped behind the brush.

The shooter was evidently unable to determine just where Hashknife had gone; so he tore a few splinters off the pole-corral, just taking a chance on scoring a hit.

Hashknife worked his way the length of the corral and into a bunch of brush on the side of the hill, where he snuggled into a depression and prayed for a chance to do a little shooting. He studied the hills beyond the ranch-house, but could see nothing.

He knew that the man had not seen him take cover on the hill, because no more shots had been fired. He had watched closely for about five minutes, when his vigilance was rewarded.

Something moved in a jumble of brush and rocks, but the distance was a good four hundred yards. It moved again, and this time Hashknife could see that it was a man.

He appeared to be moving very slowly, and was evidently trying to work his way higher in order to get a better view beyond the corral fence.

Hashknife estimated the distance and set his sights. It was a long shot and a small target, as the man did not expose much of his anatomy at a time.

The old gun kicked viciously and emitted a cloud of smoke; while its report clattered like artillery, as it echoed from the surrounding hills.

Hashknife ducked low under the smoke and saw the bullet strike. It threw up a cloud of dust about a foot below where the target had been.

"Next time, brother," promised Hashknife, as he shoved in another cartridge.

But the next moment a bullet splattered into the bank behind him, causing him to hug the ground tightly. Another struck to his left, another to his right. The man was trying to find out his location.

Another bullet ricocheted off a rock behind him, while the next one threw sand in his face.

Hashknife snorted loudly, kicked himself loose from that location and rolled back down the hill, where he scuttled up the draw a little and got behind a big rock.

"That danged old smoke-wagon sure advertised my location," he panted aloud. "Anyway, I scared him so that he wasn't exactly sure just where I was."

He stayed flat on the ground and recovered his breath, while an occasional bullet searched along the corral fence, but did no damage. He knew that the man had not seen him take cover so he felt reasonably safe.

But inaction soon palled upon him and he looked around for a good place to try for again. Just to the left of the corral was a jumble of broken rock and a clump of greasewood, which would make a fine breastworks. It was about a hundred feet away, but Hashknife took the chance and ran for it. He fell in behind the greasewood, without a shot being fired.

"That's danged funny," he told himself. "What's happened to m' friend with the .30-30?"

There was no question but what the man could have seen him make the run. He studied the spot where the man had been, but there was nothing there as far as he could see.

"Gotta make him start somethin'," he told a lone magpie, which had stopped on a tall post and was chattering angrily over something.

Hashknife drew his feet under him, gripped the rifle tightly and ran for the corner of the barn like a rabbit hunting a hole. But there was no response from the man on the hill. He crawled in through a broken window and secured a saddle-blanket, which he hung on a pitchfork and tried to draw a shot by extending it slightly past the corner of the barn.

Then he walked deliberately into the open and headed for the house. But no shots were fired at him.

"Somethin' chased him away, I reckon," he decided, as he went back into the house.

Lorna and Jimmy met him at the door while Sleepy yelled weakly for details of the slaughter.

"I shot at him once and scared him away," laughed Hashknife.

"Don't lie to a cripple," wailed Sleepy.

"Well, he just quit shootin' then," grinned Hashknife. "Somethin' scared him away, and I'm going to see if I can find out what it was. I'll be back this evenin'."

"I'm goin' to get up tomorrow," declared Sleepy hopefully, looking at the old squaw.

"I ain't sick, am I, mother?"

"You pretty good. Get up bimeby."

"Yuh betcha. I can ride and shoot as good as ever and I'm danged if I'm goin' to let you have all the fun."

Hashknife laughed teasingly.

"Sleepy, I sure had fun. That son-of-a-gun seen the smoke from this old rifle and he sure salivated everythin' in range. *Powee-e-e-el* Bullets everywhere, and me down in a little swale, with m' stummick wrapped around my vertebray. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Sleepy swore softly at anybody lucky enough to have fun like that, and Hashknife went swiftly down to the barn and saddled his horse. Jimmy, the half-breed, had put up the horse the night before. Hashknife still kept the Sharps rifle, and rode away with it across the fork of his saddle.

He pointed straight into the hills to the spot where the man had been hiding. The downpour of rain the night before had softened the ground a little, and Hashknife was able to find where the man's heels had dug into the dirt.

He trailed the man to the top of the hog-back, but there he was forced to give up the scent. Greasewood and tall sage grew in profusion on this hog-back, and the man had evidently taken advantage of it, as the last tracks that Hashknife had found were pointing up the slope.

He mounted again and followed the ridge, watching closely. He rode around the heads of several brushy coulees and was about to head back toward the road, when he spied a rider crossing the coulee below him. Hashknife dropped off his horse and watched closely. The rider went slowly up the side of the hill, going cautiously and scanning the country carefully.

"Poco Saunders," muttered Hashknife, as he adjusted his sights carefully. "Poco, yo're coyote bait right now."

But something in Poco's actions caused him to hold his fire. He was leaning down from his saddle, as if searching for something on the ground. He rode ahead a short distance and from his actions it seemed that he was following a trail.

Hashknife squatted low in the brush and watched him reach the ridge and disappear over the other side.

"Now that's a queer actin' jasper," Hashknife told his horse. "Mebbe we better see what's ailin' him."

He circled the head of the coulee and picked up Poco's horse-tracks. He waited a while and finally he saw Poco far down the next coulee, heading along the side of it, still looking down.

Hashknife looked closely down at the horse-tracks and discovered that two horses had passed that way.

"Poco's trailin' somebody, and I'm trailin' him," he laughed. "Kinda like button, button, who's got the button."

He gave Poco plenty of time to get out of sight before he took up the trail again, which kept bearing toward the road. Finally he reached the top of the hill, where he could look down at the road, but the trail did not lead directly down.

He could see where Poco had started down, lost the trail and had come back to the top again. The trail led along the top for possibly an eighth of a mile, as if the rider had been looking over the country below, and headed down a heavily wooded coulee, which opened into a little swale down near the road.

At the lower end of the open swale was a

clump of old cottonwoods, and it was near these that the trail practically ended. Here were the marks of footprints, as if the horse had stood there several minutes.

"Heard somebody comin' along the road," decided Hashknife, as he went on down to the road, where all the footprints jumbled into those of the regular-country traffic.

Hashknife noted that he had struck the road just below where the road forked to the Circle Cross ranch; so he swung to the east and rode slowly through the hills to the ranch.

He wondered what Poco was doing in the hills and who he was trailing.

"Was Poco doin' the shootin'?" he wondered. "Did somebody scare him and was he trailin' this other party to see what they were up to? Or did Poco happen in, hear the shots and start trailin' the shooter?"

As far as he could see, Poco carried no rifle; but at that distance it would not be possible to see whether there might be one in a scabbard on the saddle.

"Anyway," he decided as he rode in at the ranch, "the shooter got scared and pulled out. They may be goshawful bad, but they can be scared, that's a cinch."



HE PUT up his horse and went up to the house, where he found Buck Avery eating breakfast. Buck looked unkempt and appeared to be still shaky from drink.

"'Lo, Hartley," he grunted, helping himself to more black coffee. "They tell me yore friend got shot yesterday. How's he gittin' along?"

"Fine, Buck. Didn't hurt him much, and he'll be out right away."

"Tha's good," mumbled Buck. "Had yore breakfast?"

"Yeah, long time ago."

"Time f'r another. Hey! Quong! Fry the gent some aigs."

"Yessah, lite away."

Hashknife did not object. He was always in the mood for ham and eggs, and it had been two hours or more since he had eaten.

"Where's Trainor?" asked Hashknife.

"Gone t' town with Lanpher. Poco went over to the Tomahawk t' see how yore friend is. Didn't yuh meet him?"

Hashknife shook his head and attacked his eggs.

"No. I came across the hills."

"Uh-huh."

Buck gulped his coffee and began rolling a cigaret.

"I'm off the hooch," he declared. "I've seen a whole danged mee-nag-i-ree pee-radin' around here the last two days. Caught me two vi'let colored elephants las' evenin', but they gnawed their way out of the corral."

He got up rather unsteadily and headed for the bunk-house. Hashknife laid aside his knife and fork. Something caused him to distrust Buck, although he could not see how Buck could have done all the deviltry. He sauntered out and went down to the barn, where he examined Buck's horse, but there was nothing to show that the animal had been ridden that day. It was true that Buck could have removed all traces of travel; but the animal's spirits did not fit in with a fifteen-mile trip.

"If he rode yuh today, he didn't ride yuh far," declared Hashknife, and went outside where he sat down on an old lumber-pile and grew comfortable over his cigaret.

Mrs. Lanpher came out on the porch of the ranch-house and Hashknife mentally compared her and her daughter to Mrs. Cassidy, the squaw, and Lorna.

"Too much money and too much convention," decided Hashknife. "They ain't a danged bit natural. Still, they're mothers, just the same—and this one's got a boy in jail."

He sauntered up to the porch and was surprized to receive a cordial "good-morning" from Mrs. Lanpher.

"Sure is a nice mornin', ma'am," admitted Hashknife, sitting down on the steps. "How's all yore folks?"

"Mr. Lanpher has gone to town with Mr. Trainor and Helen has a slight headache," she replied.

"What is the latest news from your friend who was hurt last night?"

"Thank yuh kindly, ma'am; he's doin' fine. He got kinda ripped up a little, thasall."

"I am very glad to hear he is doing so well. I asked my husband to explain some of these things to me last night, and what he told me was surprizing, to say the least. Why the whole country must be in a turmoil. And nobody knows who is doing it all."

"No, ma'am, they sure don't. . . Yore husband and Trainor are doin' everythin' they can, I reckon."

She nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"I know little about these things, but it seems that the loss in stock has been tremendous. But—" she stared across the gray hills and her lips twitched slightly—"I—I would not mind it—the money part of it—if my boy was back with us again."

"Yes'm, that part of it is kinda hard," agreed Hashknife. "I'd sure like to help him, ma'am. But you've sure got to take him away from the range country, when he gets loose."

"Yore boy is all right, ma'am; he's fine, inside. But he got a lot of queer notions, don'tcha know it? Somebody told him that he was a good shot, and he immediate and soon proclaims himself a gunman and goes seekin' a victim."

"He got to likin' whisky, too. It's bad for kids, ma'am. Ben's all right, and I don't want yuh to think that I'm paintin' him worse than I ought to. Yessir, he's all right."

"Thank you, Mr. Hartley," she said softly. "I feel that you know my boy well enough to express an opinion. We have been lax with him, I know. Mr. Lanpher was not at all discreet in the matter of his—er—feelings toward the half-breed girl. Of course it was absurd for Ben to think of such an alliance, but it might have been handled differently."

"Well," Hashknife settled himself and began rolling a cigaret carefully. "Well, ma'am, there's a lot worse things could happen to Ben. Half-breeds don't make bad wives. I 'member that old Jake Dickson married one over in the Button Willer country, and she stood for old Jake two years before she killed him in a friendly fight."

"And there was old 'Shep' Hardy, over in the Skiwaumpus country. He married a breed girl. Everybody said that no human could get along with old Shep for thirty days; but she was ca'm and patient with him—which no white woman would have been—and he annoyed her for darned near a year before she stole the ladder out of his prospect shaft and left him there, while she run away with a sheepherder. I tell yuh, they're fine wives, if yuh give 'em a chance, ma'am."

"Horrors!" Mrs. Lanpher shuddered visibly.

"Of course," amended Hashknife, "he ain't got her yet, and he may not be lucky enough to get her; but she's a fine girl."

"But to think of Benjamin Lanpher marrying an Indian! Why, it would never do at all, don't you see?"

"She sure's got ancestors," grinned Hashknife. "I heard a feller braggin' once about his ancestors comin' over in the *Mayflower*. Called his family old-timers. He sure paraded his great-grandpas, until a dark-complected gent spoke up and said that his folks was pretty good sort of folks, until that darned boat showed up."

"Come to find out, the dark-complected gent had a lot of Delaware Injun blood in him, and he proved to this *Mayflower* gent that his Injun ancestors were free as birds years before the *Mayflower* gent's ancestors quit bein' branded by their owners."

"I—I suppose that is true," agreed Mrs. Lanpher, "but that does not lessen the fact that we do not want Ben to marry this girl."

"All right," said Hashknife. "Neither do I, ma'am. Talkin' seriously, I don't like marriages of that kind. I've got a lot of respect for Injun blood, when it ain't been tainted. Mixin' Injun and white blood brings out the vices of both and the virtues of neither."

"Lorna is a doggoned sweet little girl—too sweet for yore son—the way he's been actin'. And I'm whisperin' my objections to this here marriage as much for her sake as for Ben. She's got just as much right to be happy as he has, don't cha see? I reckon we all dislike to see 'em get married. Even Trainor don't like it."

"That is one of the reasons that Ben refused to stay here on this ranch," explained Mrs. Lanpher. "Mr. Trainor knew what Ben was doing, so he wrote to us about it. Ben resented it greatly and left the ranch."

"That was too bad," agreed Hashknife heartily.

"You've known Trainor a long time, ain't yuh, ma'am?"

"Mr. Lanpher has."

"Ma'am, I am goin' to ask yuh a personal question, if yuh don't mind."

Mrs. Lanpher looked curiously at him.

"A personal question?"

"Yes'm; I was goin' to ask yuh if yore

daughter is goin' to marry Trainor?"

Mrs. Lanpher's lips shut tightly, but she smiled a trifle as she shook her head.

"No, I do not think so. Why do you ask that question?"

"Just kinda curious, thasall."

"No." Mrs. Lanpher shook her head and sighed deeply. "A year ago Helen was not of age, and Mr. Trainor wanted her to marry him. I refused, because I did not think that she knew her own mind in the matter. And more than that, Mr. Trainor is twice her age."

"No doubt Mr. Trainor would make a good husband; but with her advantages I think she could do much better. I explained it fully to Mr. Trainor and he was gentleman enough to—well, not exactly agree with me—but to drop the matter."

"What did Mr. Lanpher think of it?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, he was not at all diplomatic. He said it was absurd—and I think he told Mr. Trainor just that."

Hashknife rubbed out his cigaret against the step and got to his feet. Poco Saunders was riding in through the main gate, heading for the barn. Hashknife turned to Mrs. Lanpher.

"Ma'am, I didn't mean to pry into yore family affairs, and I ask yore pardon. I'll sure do all I can to open the jail for yore boy."

"Thank you so much," she replied. "It was good to just have some one to talk to, and those family affairs are no secret."

Hashknife lifted his hat and went to the barn where Poco was unsaddling. He looked at Hashknife curiously, but said nothing as he hung up his saddle and came back to the door.

"I been out to the Tomahawk," volunteered Poco.

"Yeah, I seen yuh," replied Hashknife easily.

"Yuh did?" Poco squinted reflectively, thoughtfully.

"Yuh did?" He repeated the question. "Where?"

"Back in the hills," Hashknife was watching Poco closely, but he was relaxed, as he leaned against the door.

"Back in the hills, eh?" Softly.

"Uh-huh," Hashknife took a deep breath and hooked his thumbs over his belt.

"Poco Saunders, we're goin' to trade talk this time."

Poco looked up quickly, but there was no anger, no defiance in his dark eyes.

"We're goin' to trade talk," said Hashknife, "and yo're goin' to talk first, Poco."

Poco nodded slowly and a bitter smile flashed across his thin lips, as he said—

"Where do I begin, Hartley?"

"Start in with this mornin', Poco."

"We got up early this mornin', Hartley. After breakfast, me and Lanpher and Trainor started for town. Trainor's got an idea of follerin' the sheriff's idea of makin' up a big posse. We got almost to town and they got to talkin' about Stevens gettin' shot. Kinda wonderin' how he is, yuh know, and they decided that I'm to ride back to the Tomahawk ranch and see how hings are goin'.

"I'm to tell you that they're goin' to make up this big posse, and then I might as well go back to the ranch. Lanpher gets to kinda worryin' about the women bein' alone, and all that. I rides back and I'm almost to the —"

"What time did yuh leave the ranch?" interrupted Hashknife.

"I dunno. It wasn't much after daylight. Why?"

"Go ahead."

"Like I just said, I'm almost to the Tomahawk, when I hears a shot. I stops and considers things. Mebbe I'm there five or ten minutes, when there's more shootin'. I mosey on up the road, and I'm almost to the ranch, when I see the shooter. He's quite a ways from me, but I think he seen me at the same time. Anyway, he ducks real rapid.

"I take things kinder easy, and foller him. That rain made the ground kinda soft and I'm able to trail him, but it only winds through the hills and comes back to the road. Then I go back to the Tomahawk and find you gone. Anythin' else?"

"Only to say that you told the truth, Poco. Do you want to ask me any questions?"

Poco considered deeply for a while, and then—

"Who are you, Hartley?"

"Cowpuncher," grinned Hashknife. "Just a puncher."

"Uh-huh. Why is somebody tryin' to kill you?"

Hashknife scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Poco, I can't tell yuh, because I

ain't sure. Yuh see, they ain't never told me why. Mebbe I've got my own ideas on the subject, but a feller is liable to figure things a little wrong."

Poco nodded thoughtfully, his eyes squinted. Hashknife studied him for a moment and then—

"Poco, I forgot to ask yuh one question."

"Thasso? What is it?" Poco did not look up.

"You asked me who I am—who are you?"

"Me?" Poco's thin lips fluttered in a bitter laugh. "I'm a — fool, I reckon."

Hashknife laughed and slapped him on the back.

"Poco, we all are, but we're just as happy as though we had good sense. I hate to pry into anybody's private affairs, but I'd sure like to know why Smoky held out to try and convict old Pinto Cassidy."

"Don't you think he's guilty?" queried Poco.

"No—do you?"

"I did," said Poco shortly, and after a few moments of reflection—

"He threatened to kill any Circle Cross puncher that trespassed on the Tomahawk."

"Why?"

"I told yuh once that I didn't know why, Hartley. But I think it was on account of the half-breed girl."

Poco turned away and headed for the bunk-house, while Hashknife sat down beside the barn in the shade, and watched Poco go jerkily along on his high-heeled boots.

"You've got an ax to grind, but I don't think yuh know where to find the grindstone," observed Hashknife to himself. "I'd rather have yuh on my side than against me, 'cause you come nearer bein' a cold-blooded gunman than anybody I've seen for quite a while."

Hashknife had never seen Poco Saunders in trouble, but he felt instinctively that Poco would be swift with a gun. Every motion betokened the gunman; cool, calculating, sober and unemotional.

Hashknife felt sure that Poco had been greatly affected by the murder of Smoky Cole, his bunkie. There was no doubt that Poco did not know who had killed Smoky, but that Poco was trying hard to find out.

Poco had used the past tense in speaking

of his opinion of Cassidy's guilt, and Hashknife wondered whether the recent bushwhacking had convinced Poco that both Cassidy and Ben Lanpher were innocent.

"Well, we're earnin' that Lanpher money that's a cinch," observed Hashknife. "This kind of a job needs armor more than it does brains."

HE GOT to his feet as Trainor, Lanpher and a third man rode in through the big gate, and waited for them to come to the barn. It was not until this third man dismounted that Hashknife recognized him as being Carsten, the cattle-buyer, whom he and Sleepy had met at Lanpher's house in San Francisco.

Both Trainor and Lanpher spoke to Hashknife, but Carsten did not even look at him.

"Hartley, will yuh take care of the horses?" asked Trainor, handing Hashknife his reins.

Hashknife nodded and collected the three sets of reins.

"We'll go up to the house," said Trainor, and he and Carsten started away.

Lanpher stooped to take off his spurs and when he stood up, the other two were half-way to the house.

"I got Carsten aside and told him not to recognize you," explained Lanpher hurriedly. "I didn't want even Trainor to know that Carsten met you."

"That's the stuff," grinned Hashknife, but added, "Even if everybody else seems to know what we're tryin' to do here."

"It must be only the guilty ones, though," protested Lanpher quickly. "We had a talk with the sheriff and he plans a big sweep of the whole country very soon. How is Stevens?"

"He's doin' fine. That squaw sure beats the doctors."

Lanpher frowned slightly, but a glad smile chased it away immediately, as he said:

"Hartley, my boy gets his trial day after tomorrow. We were notified of it today. Mitchell, the San Francisco lawyer, will defend him. He gets his trial even ahead of Cassidy's second one."

"Mitchell is optimistic, but admits that the evidence is greatly against us. In fact—" Lanpher's eyes were wistful and his voice broke slightly—"In fact, we haven't any evidence in our favor, except Ben's unsup-

ported word. He—he had been rather wild, I am told, and that will all be against him; but my boy did not commit murder, Hartley."

Hashknife shook his head in agreement and turned to the barn door with the horses.

"No, I don't reckon he did. Ben was just a plumb — fool, thasall. He's got a hard, hard fight ahead of him, Lanpher, and some of them recent wild oats are goin' to make all of yuh sick of the lad's sowin'. But you stick with him."

"That prosecutin' attorney is sure goin' to hang a red fringe around the kid, y'betcha. He'll make you think you raised a locoed bobcat instead of a boy; but don't mind him. He's paid to say nasty things about folks."

Lanpher nodded slowly, as he held out his hand to Hashknife.

"Hartley, I appreciate what you've said."

They shook hands solemnly and Lanpher went to the house, where Mrs. Lanpher and Helen were talking to Carsten and Trainor. Hashknife stabled the horses and went to the bunk-house, where he found Buck half-asleep on a bunk and Poco playing his interminable game of solitaire.

Hashknife told them that Lanpher and Trainor had returned, and mentioned the stranger, who limped slightly with his right leg.

"Kinda thin-faced?" asked Poco indifferently. "Little gray in his hair?"

"Uh-huh."

Buck cleared his throat huskily.

"Must be Carsten, Poco," and to Hashknife:

"He's a cattle-buyer. Works for some Eastern outfit."

"Sets on a horse like a puncher," observed Hashknife.

Buck laughed.

"Oh, I reckon, Carsten ain't no tender-foot. Feller's kinda got to *sabe* horses and cows, if he's goin' to mix with cattle-folks and buy their stock."

"Yeah, that's true," admitted Hashknife.

He sauntered outside and saddled his horse. Inaction palled upon him so he rode up past the ranch-house and told Trainor that he was going back to the Tomahawk. Trainor came down from the porch.

"Lanpher just told me that Stevens is gettin' along fine," he said. "We're glad to hear it. We talked with the sheriff to-day, and in a short time we are going to comb these hills so thoroughly that even

a gopher will have to dig deep to keep out of our way.

"You go right ahead over to the Tomahawk and stay as long as yuh want to. Mr. Carsten, a cattle-buyer, will be here for a few days, and I will likely be busy with him. Ben Lanpher's trial comes up Wednesday; so his father will likely be busy with the lawyer. Poco and Buck can take care of everything."

He glanced down toward the bunk-house, and added—

"If Buck will try and stay sober."

"I reckon he's sick of liquor," grinned Hashknife.

"By —, I hope so! He ain't got no judgment. Well, so-long, and good luck."

Trainor had been drinking a little—just enough to put him in rare good humor, and Hashknife wondered if he brought some liquor out to Buck.

Hashknife turned at the forks of the road and headed for Wolf Wells. He wanted to get away from the two ranches and mix with people. He felt that there was nothing to be learned from the people at either the Circle Cross or the Tomahawk; so why bother with them?



IN THE Lily of the Valley saloon, Hashknife found Lonesome Hobbs and Bility Edwards. Lonesome's fat face was as placid as a mountain pool and his eyes were round and solemn. Bility was also very solemn of demeanor.

They both nodded to Hashknife, who invited them to partake of his hospitality. It was then that Hashknife discovered that Lonesome and Bility were gloriously, shamelessly drunk. Lonesome nearly fell down in merely turning around to the bar.

He looked at Hashknife, wide-eyed and said—

"Gotta roo—roosh-ter?"

"Got a rooster?"

"Yesh," nodded Bility, "Need one—bad."

"What for?" Hashknife grinned at their earnestness.

"Fight," explained Lonesome, trying to make the glass and bottle meet.

The bartender rescued them both, when Lonesome dropped them disgustedly.

"Whitey's got roosh'er," said Lonesome. "Pre'y good one, too, y'betcha. Fight'n rooshter. Yesshir, he's gone af'er it."

"Who's Whitey?" asked Hashknife.

"He owns the depot," said Bility with great deliberation.

Came the sound of unsteady footsteps, and Whitey Anderson bumped his way in through the front door. Anderson was in the same condition as Lonesome and Bility, and in his two hands he carried a bedraggled-looking rooster.

"C'mon with your fight'n animals," croaked Whitey. "Bring 'm big and bring 'm strong. H'rah, f'r my he-hen!"

"Misser Andershon," said Lonesome gravely, "shake han's with my ol' friend Hartley. Very ol' friend, 'ndeed."

"How doo-o-o," drawled Whitey, and let loose of his rooster to shake hands with Hashknife.

The frightened bird flipped to the top of the bar, volplaned across to the top of a pool-table and scooted out the back door, cackling wildly. Lonesome made a grab at it, but missed and fell flat on his face, while Bility stumbled across him and almost knocked the bar loose from its moorings.

But Whitey paid no attention to any one, except Hashknife.

"Yesshir, I'm glad t' meet ol' friend of Lonesome Hobbs. Whatchashay your—"

He looked around and discovered Lonesome trying to get back to his feet.

"Shay, Lonesome, what shay friend's name? My gosh, you ain't got ap'plexy, have yuh? Face's all red."

"Who shoved me?" wailed Lonesome, feeling of his nose, which was bleeding slightly. "Who done it, I deman' t' know immed'ly."

"You fellers go outside to do your bumpin'!" advised the barkeep angrily. "This ain't no — corral."

"Where's m' rooshter?" demanded Whitey hotly, looking around. "Who's got 'm? Lonesome have you got 'm?"

"Nug oomp guff," declared Lonesome, holding one hand tightly over his nose and mouth.

"He says he ain't got 'em," explained Bility solemnly.

"I think he's a liar, Whitey; let's shearch him."

Bility staggered into Lonesome and tried to feel in his pockets, but Lonesome protested strenuously and Hashknife had to pry them apart.

"Got'm in hish pocket," declared Bility.

"Can't be dood," Whitey shook his head violently. "Can't put rooshter in pocket."

"Tha's right!" exclaimed Bility. "Too wild. Let's shing a shong. What shay?"

"Not in here," declared the bartender. "You cowpunchers start to sing in here and I'll——"

"Don't go no further." Lonesome shook a warning finger at the bartender. "You've threatened us s'fficiently, Misser Weed. We unnerstand yore at'tude perfec'ly; perfec'ly. You are not a frien' of a workin' man, so you ain't. I refuse to shing in yore housh. C'mon."

They strung out in single-file, with Hashknife bringing up the rear, and went into the street. Whitey leaned against the side of the building and tried to adjust his hat to an even balance.

"Mus' go back t' work," he declared, trying to force himself to a semblance of sobriety. "I'm workin' man."

"Ain't you goin' t' shing?" queried Lonesome.

"Yesh, I'll shing—shometime—but not yet. Gotta work."

He shoved himself away from the wall and wended a very erratic way down the narrow sidewalk.

"Perfec'ly capable man," declared Lonesome airily, "but he's curshed with a thirsht. Ha, ha, ha! Rhymes like a po'm. Curshed with a thirsht."

"You think yo're funny, don'tcha?" queried Bility, with drunken sarcasm.

"Yesshir, I am. Betcha I c'n make you laugh."

"Zasso? Betcha five dollars yuh can't."

"Lissen, that's a bet, now."

Lonesome shook a finger in Bility's face.

"Can't back down, yuh mus' 'member."

"Nosshir, I back down from no man. How yuh goin' do it?"

"Take off yore boots, old shad face. I'm goin' to tickle yore feet."

"Tha's dirty trick," declared Bility. "That ain't bein' funny, you danged fathead—tha's torture. But I'll let yuh try it. I'm numb all over, anyway."

He half-fell to the edge of the sidewalk and began tugging at his boot, which resisted his efforts stubbornly. Lonesome essayed to help him and Hashknife walked away, leaving them in each other's arms and the boot still intact.

Hashknife crossed the street and bought some tobacco, after which he sauntered down the street to the little depot. He found Whitey

Anderson slumped in a chair, his head dripping wet and his shirt saturated.

"Water-cure," explained Whitey. "Darn near drowned myself, but it sure sobered me up. I get with that blamed gang up there and drink too much. Anyway——" Whitey hooked his toe into the rounds of a chair and jerked it around for Hashknife— "Anyway, I'm sick as —— of this town and this job. Nothin' ever happens, except somebody gets drunk and shoots up things a little. And I mostly always miss that."

"Wolf Wells seems like a nice town," observed Hashknife.

"It does? Well, you can have it, as far as I'm concerned. I'm goin' to have another station or I quit poundin' brass."

Hashknife laughed softly over his cigaret.

"I should think you'd get lots of excitement. Train comin' in every day and all that."

"My ——!" Whitey stared at Hashknife wonderingly.

"Trains comin' in—sa-a-ay, the only reason they ever come to Wolf Wells is because there's a Y here, and it makes the engineer seasick to ride backward. Never any passengers."

"One come in this mornin', didn't he?"

Whitey grew thoughtful for a moment.

"Uh-huh. That's right, we did have one today. Yessir, I remember that Carsten came in."

"Come very often?"

"Well, not every day," grinned Whitey. "He comes every month or so—him and his limp. Yuh know, a horse or a cow stepped on him about six month ago and busted his ankle."

"Cow or a horse?" grinned Hashknife. "Don't he know which it was?"

Whitey chuckled softly and helped himself to Hashknife's cigaret makings.

"I don't think he knows. Yuh see, it was in the dark. They was loadin' a train of stock out at the loadin'-corrals and Carsten was helpin'. He sure hollered to beat ——. It kinda crippled him for a while."

"Does he buy a lot of stock around here?"

"Yeah, I think he does—quite a little. Mostly from the Circle Cross, though."

"That's what cuts down the profits on cattle—the freight," observed Hashknife. "By the time yuh pay for a lot of cars from here to Chicago, yuh ain't got much left."

"They don't pay the freight," explained

Whitey. "The buyer pays 'em so much F. O. B. They've got to load 'em, of course. But I guess they get a pretty good price, at that."

"Are most of the cattle shipped from here?"

"No-o-o. Mostly everythin' north of here ship from here, and the Flying M and the Circle Cross ship quite a lot, but the last two Circle Cross shipments went from the siding at Sandy, about five or six miles below here."

"That siding was put in for the 66 outfit, so they tell me; but anybody can use it. It's about as close to the Circle Cross as this is, and if they pick their cattle from the south range, it's closer."

"No town there?" queried Hashknife.

"Nope; not even a shed. Just a loading-corral, that's all."

A man came in to argue about an overdue express package, so Hashknife sauntered back uptown. He stopped to speak with the sheriff, who was filled with gloom over the fact that his deputy was *hors de combat*.

"Lonesome's just plain drunk," he announced. "He's bad enough when he's sober. I found him and Edwards out in the street, with their boots off, tickling each other's feet. That's a — of a thing for grown men to do."

Hashknife grinned widely and went back to his horse. He had tied the Sharps rifle to the horn of his saddle and now he rode away with it swinging in his hand. Instead of keeping to the road he turned into the hills and rode straight toward the Tomahawk.



IT WAS a broken country and he was forced to travel slowly, but it was much safer than to take chances of being shot at on the road. He passed the spot where he had picked up Poco's trail that morning, and swung wide around the coulée to come down at the west side of the Tomahawk. He had no wish to take a chance on being shot at again, although he did not expect the bushwhacker to be on the job again that day.

He came out on the brow of the hill and drew rein. There was no one in sight at the ranch-house. The sun was low over the Western hills and the air was filled with the lazy drone of insects. From down in the hills a cow bawled softly.

Suddenly the drowsy gray bronco threw

up its head, ears forward, as it glanced almost at right angles, and to the east. Hashknife turned quickly and looked in that direction.

About four hundred yards away, a man was crossing the ridge; a man who stooped low in the sage and appeared to be carrying a rifle. He stopped and appeared to turn in their direction.

Hashknife knew that the man had seen him; so he whirled his horse around and spurred him into deeper cover. As Hashknife drew up he saw the man running in the opposite direction, still running crouched over, and disappeared over the ridge.

Hashknife debated quickly. This man was armed with a rifle, and if it was the bushwhacker, he knew how to use it. He had a decided advantage over Hashknife, because he could stop just beyond the ridge and wait for Hashknife to come to him.

"He must 'a' been just givin' it up as a bad job," decided Hashknife, "and I caught him pullin' out. C'mon, bronc."

Hashknife rode back in the direction of the Tomahawk, but as soon as he crossed the top of the ridge, he spurred his horse into a gallop and cut the side of the hill toward where the man had disappeared. This left another ridge between where Hashknife rode and where the man had disappeared, and Hashknife felt sure that the man would not dare to try and cross back to his original position on the slope to the Tomahawk.

Hashknife rode about eight hundred yards along the side of the hill, swung back near the top and dismounted, leaving his horse in a heavy clump of greasewood. Cautiously he went to the top of the ridge and studied every inch of the country.

To the right of him was the spot where the man had crossed the next ridge, and Hashknife could see that the man had gone into a heavily wooded coulée. Minute after minute passed, but still Hashknife's eyes studied every bit of brush in sight.

But there was nothing, except the heat-haze of late afternoon. Across the coulée in a jumble of rocks a ground-hog whistled shrilly, angrily, as the shadow of a circling hawk passed over the rocks.

Hashknife grinned and reached for his tobacco.

"Everybody's gunnin' for somethin'," he said softly, "but a man is the weakest of all, when it comes to knowin' when to duck."

The ground-hog knows what to dodge, and that hawk ain't got a chance to collect a feed. I suppose I'd know how to dodge bullets, if my ancestors for several hundred years back had been dodgin' 'em a few times per day all their lives."

Suddenly he caught sight of a moving object far down the coulée to his left. It was almost half a mile away, but he was able to see that it was a man on a pinto horse. As Hashknife watched him he swung to the right, climbed up a narrow coulée to the top of the ridge, where he stood, silhouetted against the sky, for several moments. Then he rode over the ridge and out of sight.

"Man on a pinto," mused Hashknife. "Too far away for a shot with this old gun, and, anyway, I don't know that he's the man I'm after."

He watched for about five minutes longer and went back to his horse, where he mounted and rode to the Tomahawk ranch-house.

They were all glad to see him, especially Sleepy, who was propped up in a chair, trying to teach Lorna to roll cigarets for him. Jimmy, the half-breed, was there but, like his aboriginal ancestors, did not ask questions.

Hashknife explained to Sleepy what had happened to him after leaving there that morning; told him of following Poco Saunders, and of seeing the man on the pinto.

"Jimmy," Hashknife turned to the half-breed, "who rides a pinto horse?"

Jimmy squinted thoughtfully and shook his head.

"Nobody, I guess. I have pinto long time ago, but him stole, I think."

"Long time ago? How long is a long time, Jimmy?"

"T'ree, four month, I think."

Lorna had been an interested listener, but now she exclaimed:

"Why, the man that shot Sleepy was riding a pinto! I did not think to tell you before."

"Pinto, pinto, who owns the pinto," laughed Hashknife. "There's no pinto on the Circle Cross. Buck Avery rides a Roman-nosed buckskin and a jug-headed roan. Poco has a sorrel and a bay; Trainor keeps four others at the stable, but there ain't a pinto in the outfit."

"Well," grinned Sleepy, "mother says I'll be ridin' in a 'day or so; and we'll find out

who forks a painted bronc. You need me and my brains, cowboy."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife grinned widely. "I sure need yuh, Sleepy."

Lorna and her mother went into the kitchen and Sleepy motioned Hashknife to come closer.

"I'll tell yuh why Cassidy drew the deadline with the Circle Cross. It was because Trainor came to see Lorna and made love to her. He got drunk and bragged about it in Wolf Wells, it seems, and when Cassidy asked him if he was goin' to marry her—well, I reckon Trainor wasn't."

"Lorna didn't tell me, but her mother did. Smoky Cole came to see her a few times, too; but Mrs. Cassidy says that Smoky was nice boy."

Hashknife nodded slowly and looked straight at Sleepy.

"You ain't stuck on her, are yuh, Sleepy?"

Sleepy rubbed his hand thoughtfully on his knee, avoiding Hashknife's eyes for a moment, but looked up and said:

"No. She's goin' to marry Ben Lanpher, if he gets loose. They've been mighty good to me here, Hashknife. The old lady is a dinger, y'betcha. My own mother couldn't 'a' done more for me than she has. If old Cassidy don't get acquitted, I'm goin' down and blow a corner off that jail. Gotta do somethin' to show my appreciation."

Hashknife stayed to supper and spent the evening with them. Bright moonlight flooded the land when he started back for the Circle Cross, so he headed into the hills in preference to taking a chance along the lighted road. There were too many narrow places where a man might lie in wait with a sawed-off shotgun.

He rode slowly along the moonlit ridges, through the misty-gray-blue hills; silent, except for the occasional yipping bark of a coyote or the sleepy bawl of a cow. From far away came the faint whistle of a locomotive as the train drew near Wolf Wells.

Hashknife stopped his horse and rolled a cigaret. He could think clearer with a cigaret between his lips. He had the glimmering of an idea—a solution to the whole problem—but there were many tangles to straighten out, many loose ends to pick up yet.

"Gawd A'mighty," he said half-aloud. "I ain't askin' nothin' for me and Sleepy. That other two thousand that Lanpher offers us ain't worth prayin' for, but if you

can see yore way clear to keep them dirty pups from fillin' us with lead until I can clean up this layout, I sure wish you'd do it. Amen. 'C'mon, bronc."

Which was the nearest thing to a prayer that Hashknife Hartley had ever offered—and it was not for himself or his partner—but for those who would profit more than gold.



THE trial of Ben Lanpher for the murder of Smoky Cole was the first case on the docket and caused much speculation in the Ghost Hills Range. They came from far and wide to sit in a hot, stuffy court-room and listen to the bickerings of the attorneys. Mitchell, the San Francisco lawyer, had worked swiftly in building up a defense, which he knew to be weak and insufficient. His only argument would be that Ben was too drunk to have done the deed.

There was no one who could say what kind of a bullet had killed Smoky Cole. Lanpher had told Mitchell about the doings of the bushwhacking rustlers, but Mitchell knew that there was little hopes of throwing the guilt upon a party or parties unknown; especially after Ben's hat and gun had been found near the murdered man.

The fact that Ben and Smoky had tried to shoot each other in town, and that Ben had left town ahead of Smoky, tended to weaken the defense badly.

Eph Baker, the prosecuting attorney, chewed tobacco and grinned benevolently upon everybody. Eph was fat, and the hot weather bothered him considerably, but he realized that little effort would be necessary to win this case. He had prepared a scathing denunciation of young men who come to cowland and mix their whisky with six-guns.

It had cost him much in perspiration to prepare this tirade, but the heart within him rejoiced that he would be directing his verbal broadsides at "city-folk" and not at the people of the range country. He felt sorry for the Lanpher family, and especially for the young lady, but Eph was cognizant of his place in the sun and was going to make a name for himself, in spite of his feelings.

Ben was a greatly changed young man since his few days in jail. He realized what his escapades had done for him and there was little doubt of his sincere repentance. His mother, sister and father sat at the

table with Mitchell, while just away from them sat Ben and the sheriff.

Sleepy was able to sit in a saddle again and rode in with the family from the Tomahawk. He was a little pale and had not regained his full strength, but his six-gun swung at his hip and he prayed for an open shot at the man who had shot him from ambush.

The sheriff had questioned Hashknife regarding Lorna's identification of the man, but Hashknife had evaded the question. Several other men, who had been at that meeting, tried to find out who she had meant, but Hashknife told nobody, except Trainor. The night after he had left the Tomahawk he had met Trainor at the front of the ranch-house and had told him what Lorna had said.

Trainor was very grave over the information, and tried to remember some one who might look or ride like Buck Avery, but was unable to do so. There seemed no doubt in his mind that Lorna was mistaken in the man, because of Buck's condition.

They both agreed to say nothing more about it. Buck's spree was over and he became a normal being once more. But Poco Saunders did not seem to relax for a moment. Hashknife felt that Poco was keying himself up to a point where he was going to kill somebody. Somehow, Hashknife felt that Poco knew the guilty man—or thought he did—but was waiting until he was sure.

And Hashknife had not been shot at for a day and a half, which showed that the Fantom Riders, whoever they might be, had relaxed their aggressiveness, or decided that he was a hard target to hit. Hashknife was inclined to favor the former.

The first day of the trial was devoted to securing a jury. Few challenges were used by either side, and the usual question—

"Have you formed any opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the defendant?" was omitted.

Every one conceded that it would be a short trial, because of there being no witnesses, except those who had seen Ben Lanpher ride away ahead of Smoky Cole. The old prospector had disappeared into the hills and no one knew where he had gone. No one knew where he had come from or who he was, and it was whispered that he might be one of the rustling gang.

Hashknife rode home that evening with Trainor and Buck, while Sleepy went back

with the Cassidy family and Jimmy. The Lanphers had taken rooms at the hotel, intending to stay there during the trial. Poco remained in town, and Hashknife noticed that he was drinking a little.

Trainor and Hashknife discussed the case on the way home, but Buck had little to say.

"We've got to pull for Ben, thasall," observed Trainor. "He's up against a hard deal and I don't look for him to get loose."

"If he gets loose, Cassidy won't have much trouble," observed Hashknife. "Mitchell is goin' to work from the angle that there was bushwhackin' done before Smoky was killed and afterward. Mebbe he can convince that jury that Ben had no hand in it at all."

"He might," agreed Trainor.

Later on, Hashknife asked Buck what had become of Carsten and Buck told him that Carsten had stayed in town to see old man Shappee, but might be out to the Circle Cross the next day. Buck was not very communicative, so Hashknife let him alone. It was later in the evening that Poco came. He had been drinking, but the liquor only served to make him more quiet. Hashknife was outside the barn when Poco came out and they stood together for a while without speaking.

"Poco," said Hashknife seriously, "did you see the color of the horse you trailed?"

"Color?" Poco studied the question for a while, before he nodded and said—

"Yeah—a pinto."

"Who rides a pinto?"

"I've been tryin' to find out," said Poco slowly.

Quong's supper triangle stopped the conversation, and the trial was not discussed at the meal. Trainor seemed greatly preoccupied, Buck a little sullen and Poco quiet as usual.

Toward the end of the meal, Hashknife turned to Trainor.

"Why do they call this gang 'The Fantom Riders?'"

Trainor laughed shortly.

"I suppose it's because they work like ghosts, Hartley. Nobody has ever seen 'em."

"Has anybody ever tried to find 'em?"

Trainor leaned his elbows on the table and rested his chin on his hands.

"Tried to find 'em?" he repeated slowly, and laughed. "They sure have."

"There ain't much brains in the Ghost

Hills, then," observed Hashknife slowly.

"What do you mean?"—queried Trainor quickly, while Buck and Poco grew interested. Hashknife grinned and pursed his lips.

"Just what I said," he declared, squinting his eyes away from the smoke of his cigaret.

"It takes brains to catch ghosts."

"Mebbe you could catch 'em." Buck's remark was sarcastic, but Hashknife merely laughed at him.

"Sure I could catch 'em—if it was worth my while."

Trainor laughed and shook his head.

"I'm afraid they'd get you first, Hartley."

"Thasso? They've sure done enough shootin' at me. What I don't understand is how they ever hit anybody. Such poor shootin' as they've been doin'."

Hashknife knew that the marksmanship had been good enough, but the shooter had picked his targets at long range. Buck laughed shortly and got to his feet.

"Well," he said, "why don't yuh go out and get 'em? It'll be worth yore while, I reckon. The ranchers would be willin' to pay yuh well."

"Go ahead," grinned Trainor. "The Circle Cross will sure pay yuh a good reward and the others will chip in."

"By golly, I might, at that," laughed Hashknife.

"Lemme know when yuh start in," laughed Buck, "and I'll pick out a soft spot to bury yuh in, Hartley."

They finished their supper and went outside. It was growing dark and a slight breeze was blowing in from the north. A lone rider swung in through the main gate and rode up to them. It was Jimmy, the half-breed, and he spoke directly to Hashknife.

"You come."

"What's wrong now?" asked Hashknife quickly, thinking that the bushwhackers had been busy again.

"You come," repeated Jimmy and refused to say more.

Hashknife went straight to the barn and saddled his gray horse. Trainor came down and offered to go with him, but Hashknife shook his head.

"I'll find out what he wants, Trainor. Let yuh know later."

They rode away with the three men watching after them, and went straight down the road. Jimmy did not speak until

they were past the forks and heading toward Wolf Wells. Then he swung off the road to the right and said—

"We go here."

It was just a little below where Hashknife had trailed Poco. There was no sign of a trail, but Jimmy went steadily on and into a brushy coulee where willows and cottonwoods grew in profusion. A tiny stream trickled over the rocks and on both sides the walls were almost precipitous. It was not a spot that a rider would choose in cutting across the country. The branches whipped Hashknife across the face in spite of their slow and cautious pace.

Suddenly Jimmy stopped and Hashknife rode in beside him. They were up against a brush corral. They dismounted and Jimmy led the way around to where three poles had been placed across the opening.

And just in front of them, plainly visible even in that weak light, stood a pinto horse. Hashknife studied the horse for a few moments and turned to Jimmy.

"Is that your pinto?"

"Mine," nodded Jimmy, "Tomahawk on left shoulder."

"How did yuh find him, Jimmy?" Hashknife could not keep the elation out of his voice, and he placed a hand on the half breed's shoulder.

"I come through hills from town," explained Jimmy. "Down there," pointing back toward the road, "I find horse tracks. Rain make soft ground. Track point this way. I find 'nother horse track point this way."

"I wonder why horse come in this cañon. That's how I find. I come to you first. That my pinto, you bet."

"Good boy!" applauded Hashknife softly. "You're the smartest man in the Ghost Hills, Jimmy."

"— smart," admitted Jimmy proudly. "Now I take my pinto."

"Not yet," said Hashknife. "We've got to leave him here for a while, pardner. We know where he is, but we don't want anybody else to know that we know it; *sabe?*"

"— right!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I'm smart."

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "if we're both smart, we'd better get out of here right now. C'mon."

They went back to their horses, mounted and rode out of the cañon. Jimmy headed for the road, but Hashknife called him back

and advised that they travel through the hills to the Tomahawk.

"Remember, they might be layin' for us," warned Hashknife. "We've got to be smart—me and you, Jimmy."

"You bet," agreed Jimmy. "I'm smart. Sometime — fool. Jus' alike—mos' always."

"And you said a lot of wise words," laughed Hashknife.

They rode to the Tomahawk and Hashknife told Sleepy what they had found. Sleepy grinned with delight and fairly hugged Jimmy, the half-breed.

"But," said Hashknife sadly, "if that son-of-a-gun is as smart as he seems to be, he'll spot our horse-tracks. Yuh can't get into that place without leavin' plenty of sign."

"Well, what'll we do?" asked Sleepy.

"Be Johnny at the rat-hole," grinned Hashknife. "We've got to be there when he finds the tracks, Sleepy. We'll pull out of here before daylight and kinda drape ourselves on the edge of that cañon."

"We'll take that old Sharps along, and I'll bet he'll stop foolin' folks. You feelin' well enough for rough work, or do yuh reckon yuh better stay here and keep warm?"

"You try to stop me!" snapped Sleepy angrily.

"Pretty — well," stated the old squaw. "Good man—git well quick."

Sleepy took several naps during the night, but Hashknife huddled in a chair and smoked innumerable cigarets. The discovery of the hidden horse had simplified things to a great extent. It meant that the bushwhackers had stolen the pinto and were using him for their work, instead of using their own horses, which might be easy of identification.

All night long Hashknife puzzled over different things, trying to untangle a web of suspicions and bring them to a point where he could work upon a reasonable basis. There was nothing definite upon which to rest his suspicions, but he had the glimmering of an idea that might, if things worked out right, bring results.



HE WOKE Sleepy about two hours before daylight and they rode into the hills. To satisfy their own curiosity that the pinto had not been removed they went to the brush corral and looked at the animal.]

Then they went back to the side of the cañon, hid their horses and sat down to wait. Daylight came, but nothing else. At nine o'clock they were both tired of the vigil. Both of them were to appear at the trial, and they felt that the pinto would not be moved that day, so they mounted and rode through the hills to Wolf Wells.

Trainor, Carsten and Lanpher were together in the Antelope saloon when Hashknife and Sleepy arrived. Trainor invited them to have a drink, and afterward he and Carsten drifted away together.

Lanpher was frankly worried about the trial, although he tried to appear unconcerned. Hashknife drew him aside and they sat down together at a vacant card-table.

"I want to ask yuh a few questions," said Hashknife easily. "You handle the business end of the Circle Cross, don't yuh?"

"Yes," nodded Lanpher, "I handle most of it."

"How many head of cattle have you lost?"

Lanpher grimaced bitterly and shook his head.

"I don't know exactly, Hartley. The last roundup showed a big loss. I have talked with several other owners and they have lost more or less, but I think that we have been hit harder than any of them. Of course, we were the largest owners."

"You ought to be able to make a good guess at what you've lost," observed Hashknife. "You'd get a pretty fair count at the roundup, and you know how much you've sold."

Lanpher drew out a note-book and pencil, and, after making a few notes, tore out the page and handed it to Hashknife.

"There is the sales for this year, Hartley. I'll get the approximate roundup count from Trainor and give it to you later. He will know exactly what we started with, and what the average increase would be."

"I have never attended to that end of the thing because I have been too busy with my other interests. I am not a practical cattle-man, but Trainor knows every phase of the business, and will be able to furnish you with facts."

Hashknife glanced at the notes and put the paper in his pocket.

"I've got to check up on the amounts, or the approximate amounts of stolen stock, so as to get some idea of the bulk these thieves had to handle," he told Lanpher.

"Good idea," nodded Lanpher indifferently, as he got to his feet. "Court is about to open, I think."

He walked away toward the court room, and Hashknife sauntered down the street to the depot. Whitey Anderson was tilted back in an old chair, his feet on the table and a cob-pipe between his teeth.

"Howdy," he greeted Hashknife. "Come in and rest your feet. How come you ain't at the trial?"

"Danged place is too stuffy," grinned Hashknife, seating himself on the counter beside the clattering telegraph instrument.

"I probably won't be called before afternoon, anyway."

Hashknife rolled a cigaret and listened to the clicking sounder, although he did not understand the difference between a dot and a dash.

"Say, I got into a kind of a mix-up over a darned telegram," he told Whitey. "Along about the tenth of this month I sent a telegram to a certain party here in Wolf Wells and he swears he never got it."

"Swears he didn't?"

Whitey twisted the pipe-stem between his teeth and looked foolishly solemn.

"Swears he didn't get it, eh?"

"Yeah," Hashknife nodded seriously. "I think the darned jug-head got it all right, but didn't want to answer it. Telegrams don't get lost, do they, Whitey?"

"Hm-m-m! Might—but they don't very often. About the tenth, eh? Who was it sent to, Hartley?"

"Well, I don't want to say," laughed Hashknife, "but if I knowed for sure, I'd make him a little bet that he got it."

"By golly, I'd know if he got it."

Whitey got to his feet rather belligerently. Hashknife laughed softly.

"Don't get mad, Whitey, but this feller said that you'd likely got drunk and lost it."

"Is that so?"

Whitey slammed his pipe down on the counter and drew a bulky, flimsy-leaved volume from under the counter-top. He began flipping over the leaves, grunting to himself, while Hashknife peered over his shoulders, scanning the imprint of the telegrams.

Page after page flipped past, until certain dates caused Whitey to scan them closer. Carefully they looked them over.

"Did yuh sign your own name?" asked

Whitey, going back over certain dates carefully.

"Yeah, I sure did," said Hashknife, his eyes shining with sudden delight.

"Well—" Whitey slapped the book shut and tossed it back under the counter—

"Well, it never came to this office, Hartley—That's a cinch. Where did yuh send it from?"

"Phoenix," lied Hashknife. "Dang it, I thought this feller just didn't want to admit it, but I guess it got lost."

"Well, you can tell him that I didn't lose it," said Whitey half-angrily. "And you can tell him that I've only been drunk twice since I came here."

"Aw, don't mind him," laughed Hashknife. "He was drunk when he said it."

Hashknife wandered back uptown, sat down on the board sidewalk and scribbled a few words on the back of an old envelope. He seemed pleased with himself, as he softly sang:

"I loved a maiden, whose hair was like go-o-old,
And her eyes were as blue as the se-e-e-a.
She said she'd be tr-r-r-rue,
But didn't say who to-o-o.
I know now that she didn't mean me-e-e-e."

Oh, I'm goin' to Montana,
The trail's mighty long-g-g,
But a trail's always shorter
When I'm singin' my so-o-ong."

Hashknife wailed that last soft note and grinned at his own efforts. He was not musical. In fact, he hardly knew the difference between "Home, Sweet Home" and "Little Brown Jug," except for the difference in words.

And it was not often that Hashknife sang; but just now he felt that he was entitled to lift his voice in song. Trainor was coming up the sidewalk with old man Shappee and Hashknife joined them. They were going to a restaurant; so Hashknife went along.

"You won't have to be a witness," said Trainor, as they sat down. "The sheriff and Lonesome testified about findin' the body, and told about you bein' with them. It would only be a case of repeatin' the testimony."

"I don't reckon that the prisoner has got a chance in the world," declared Shappee. "I never seen such a weak defense as he's got. By — I feel sorry for Lanpher; but

I'd have to convict him, if I was on that jury."

"Looks bad for him," agreed Trainor. "It looks bad."

"Well, it's just so danged weak that the case will go to the jury in the mornin'," said Shappee. "It ain't what you'd call interestin'. Eph Baker's got a cinch case and he knows it."

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "yuh never can tell."

"No, that's a fact. Cow-country juries are funny things."

After lunch Trainor drew Hashknife aside and tried to find out why Jimmy, the half-breed, came after him; but Hashknife only laughed and told him that Sleepy had sent for him.

"Jimmy made it look like somethin' important," grinned Hashknife, "but it wasn't."

Trainor lifted his eyebrows slightly, as if in disbelief, but Hashknife said nothing more. Carsten limped up from the courtroom and announced his intentions of getting some food, and in a few minutes court adjourned and Sleepy joined Hashknife.

The Lanpher family came along together and Hashknife noticed that Mrs. Lanpher had been crying. He went to them and tried to laugh away their fears.

"There ain't nothin' as bad as it looks," he told her. "You keep on grinnin', ma'am."

"There seems to be little cause for smiles," said Helen wistfully. "Everything is wrong."

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"No, m'am; that's the wrong way to think. Down deep in yore heart you know danged well that Ben didn't do it. He knows he didn't; but when he looks at yuh and sees yuh cryin' and looking gosh-awful sad—well, he kinda figures that yuh ain't with him."

"Cryin' is fine sometimes." Hashknife turned to Mrs. Lanpher, as though half-apologizing. "Yessir, it sure helps once in a while. But if you needed help real bad, would yuh expect to get it from a cryin' person or one that smiles?"

"I can see your point," said Mrs. Lanpher sadly, but trying to smile.

"Certainly, we all can," said Lanpher.

Mrs. Cassidy, the squaw, Lorna and Jimmy were coming from the courtroom and the Lanphers moved aside to let them pass on the narrow sidewalk.

Lorna stopped and looked at Mrs. Lanpher.

"Why do you cry?" she asked softly. "Are you afraid?"

Mrs. Lanpher forced a smile as she shook her head.

"I am trying to not be afraid, child."

Lorna nodded and looked up at Hashknife.

"We are not afraid, are we?"

It was not what she said or the way she said it that made Hashknife stutter his reply of—

"Yuh—yuh bet we ain't, Lorna."

She smiled around at them and hurried to catch up with her mother, while the Lanphers looked after her.

"There's the prettiest girl in the world," declared Hashknife aloud, although he had meant to say it only to himself. Sleepy was looking queerly at him and Hashknife blushed hotly.

"Was Ben really going to marry her?" asked Helen.

"Is going to," corrected Sleepy.

"Not if I can prevent it," declared Lanpher quickly.

"Which you can't," smiled Hashknife.

Trainor and Carsten joined them; so Hashknife and Sleepy walked down the street and crossed over to the Antelope saloon, where they found Poco and Buck Avery. Poco was drinking steadily, but the whisky showed little effect on him.

Several poker-games were in progress, and in a few minutes Carsten and Trainor came in and took seats in a game. Carsten spoke to Poco, but only received a black look for his courtesy. Poco was in no mood for companionship.

Hashknife and Sleepy stayed around town for an hour or so, but did not go to the courtroom. The place was crowded to the doors and the sun beat down on the old frame building with great intensity.

Poco watched them mount and ride back toward the ranch and in a few minutes he mounted and went out of town, sitting very straight in spite of all he had drunk during the day.

Hashknife and Sleepy went straight to the brush corral and found the pinto still there. It was evident that the Phantom Riders were not aware that their hidden mount had been discovered—or perhaps they did not care.

"Mebbe they've found out that we know

about the pinto and will quit comin' here," suggested Sleepy.

"They might, but I don't believe it," said Hashknife. "Somethin' caused 'em to lay off us for a while; but they'll be back. They won't lay off us until they're behind the bars or we're under the grass."

"I'll choose the latter," said Sleepy seriously. "I've always wished to have 'Grandpaw' carved on my tombstone. But I s'pose I'll poke my nose into trouble along with you until somebody'll select me a tenor-harp, which won't match my sopraner voice a-tall."

Hashknife shook his head.

"No, I don't reckon we're born to be shot, Sleepy. We've been shot at with everythin' except a bow and arrows, ain't we?"

"And sling-shots," laughed Sleepy. "But some danged poor shot will nail us both with a .22 some of these days. That's fate, old-timer."

"Well, we ain't learnin' nothin' by settin' here," said Hashknife, getting to his feet. He looked down at the brush corral and scanned the gray hills, where the heat-haze danced in waves.

"I'll tell yuh what to do, Sleepy. You go back to the Tomahawk and get a good sleep. Take it easy until an hour or so before daylight. Then you take that old Sharps rifle and come down here. Locate yourself where yuh can watch this pinto; *sabe?*"

"And if anybody comes after it, I'll shoot 'em loose from their disposition," nodded Sleepy eagerly.

"Make sure that it ain't me, cowboy."

"Well, I'll sure know the shape of his jaw before I pull the trigger of that old dreadnaught, y'betcha. What are you goin' to do, Hashknife?"

"I'm goin' to the Circle Cross for the night; but you'll sure see me or hear from me early in the mornin'. You better stick to the hills all the way home, Sleepy."

"Danged right. I've only got one life to give for my country, and I'm sure goin' to be stingy with that. Look out for yourself, long feller."

Hashknife watched Sleepy ride away up the brushy slope, and swung back across the swale at the bottom of the corral cañon. He rode slowly, skirting the side of the hill until he reached the other swale above the road, where he had trailed Poco Saunders.

Near the cottonwood clump he dismounted and looked closely at the ground. There were a number of horse-tracks, jumbled together; some hardly visible, which were made before the rain.

Hashknife studied them closely, leading his horse from place to place. Then he found the imprint of a high-heeled boot, where a man had dismounted.

"Now what did he get off for?" wondered Hashknife as he scanned the swale.

The clump of old cottonwoods attracted him, so he led his horse down toward them. Farther down he found another heel-print, pointing toward the trees.

He walked up to the clump dropped his reins and looked around. There was nothing visible. He entered the clump and studied it from all angles. The road was not visible from any point in there.

"They didn't hide here to bushwhack anybody, that's a cinch," he muttered. "Smoky was probably shot from the other side of the road, and Jimmy, the half-breed, was shot from that direction."

Hashknife rolled a cigaret and leaned against the bole of one of the trees. As he passed the paper across his lips he lifted his head and glanced into the foliage. For a moment he stared intently and the cigaret slipped from between his fingers.

Just about the height of a man's reach, hanging closely against the gray bark of the old cottonwood, was a rifle in a canvas and leather scabbard. It was so nearly the color of the old bark that it would hardly be visible, unless seen at close quarters.

Hashknife stepped over and unhooked the strap off the short limb. The rifle was a Winchester, .30-30, wrapped in oiled cloth, and filled with cartridges. He examined it closely and noted the peep sights, the well-kept mechanism and the polished bore.

Then he took out his pocket-knife, opened the screw-driver blade and grinned widely as he deftly ruined the firing-pin. Then he wrapped the gun in its oiled-cloth, slid it back into the scabbard and replaced it as he had found it.

He went back to his horse, mounted and circled back a mile into the hills before striking the road and heading for the Circle Cross. And for the first time since coming to the Ghost Hills Range, he re-

laxed in his saddle and sang softly, all unconscious of his words or music:

"There's a range far away in a beautiful land,
Where cowboys live happy and free-e-e;
And all decks have six aces
All the girls pretty faces,
O-o-oh, that is the land for me-e-e-e.

I'm goin' to Montana,
The trail's mighty long-g-g,
But a trail's always shorter,
When I'm singin' my song."

X TRAINOR came to the ranch alone that evening. He said that Buck had started drinking again and would probably stay in Wolf Wells that night. The case had gone to the jury that afternoon.

"You've got to give Eph Baker a lot of credit," said Trainor, as they sat down to supper.

"He didn't make any plea. He knows that the case is a dead open-and-shut; so he told the judge and jury that he would not make any plea. Mitchell had little to say.

"He talked kinda soft to the jury and asked them to remember that murder had been done from ambush twice just a short time before, and had been attempted since.

"He pointed out the fact that Ben was just a wild kid and was drunk at the time. No, Mitchell didn't have no defense to speak of."

"Then you think they'll hang the kid?" queried Hashknife.

"No-o-o; they'll likely send him up for life."

"Life's a long time," mused Hashknife, sadly. "Didja ever think what that means, Trainor? It don't even give yuh a fightin' chance. Day after day, day after day—knowin' that yuh can't ever get out."

"Feller had better die fightin'," nodded Trainor.

"Yeah, that would be better. But what's after death? Do we go into a better world, I wonder. I often wonder if cows and horses live in the hereafter."

"That's a — of a thing to think about," grunted Trainor. "Man would go loco tryin' to think about it. My theory is this: When yore dead, yore dead—and that's all there is to it."

"Then what's the use of livin' and tryin' to make somethin' of yourself, Trainor? What good does it all do yuh?"

Nossir, I think that there's somethin' else."

"Why should there be?" growled Trainor.

"Because God had somethin' in mind when he created man. He gave men and women a soul—or whatever it is that makes us what we are. Where does that go when the body dies. Does it die, too. You believe in God, don't yuh, Trainor?"

Trainor shoved away his plate and bit off the end of a cigar before he said:

"I've never had time to believe in anythin' that I can't see. Whatcha tryin' to do, start a revival?"

"Only what yuh can see?" laughed Hashknife. "Then yuh don't believe you've got a heart inside yuh, eh?"

"——, I can feel that!"

"Some folks claim they can feel God A'mighty."

"Aw-w-w ——!"

Trainor kicked back his chair and strode into the living-room, while Hashknife grinned at Quong and held out his cup for more coffee.

Quong grinned and shuffled over with the pot.

"I no *sabe* Melican God," he said softly. "*Isabe* Chinese God, you bet. Plenty good."

"They're all the same, Quong. Do right all the time, help everybody, sing and smile. That's God, Quong."

"You —— right! You be plenty bad, you catch —— sure."

"And yuh don't have to die to get it either."

"Nossah. Plenty catchum lite here."

Hashknife grinned and followed Trainor into the living room, where he found the Circle Cross owner humped over in a rocking-chair, reading a newspaper. He grunted at Hashknife, but did not look up.

"When does the sheriff start his posse combin' the hills?" asked Hashknife.

Trainor glanced up at him, but turned back to his paper.

"How do I know?" he growled.

"I just wondered."

Hashknife walked to the front door and squinted off across the hills. He leaned against the doorway and looked back at Trainor.

"Say, I'll betcha he don't never do it, Trainor."

"Eh?"

Trainor turned his head quickly.

"Why won't he?"

Hashknife laughed shortly, seriously.

"Trainor, I've come to the conclusion that the best thing I can do is to plumb ruin these Fantom Riders."

"Yeah?"

Trainor placed his newspaper on the table and swung his chair around. Hashknife's statement was worth his undivided attention, but the half-grin on his lips showed that he was a trifle skeptical.

"Just how do you intend to do this, Hartley?" he asked.

"By exposing the Fantom Riders."

Trainor squinted closely at Hashknife, as if trying to see if he was joking; but the tall cowboy's face was very serious.

"Yeah?" Trainor laughed shortly. "Well, just how are you goin' to do that?"

"I ain't quite sure," Hashknife grinned thoughtfully and shook his head. "I've got the goods on 'em right now, but I don't want to tell anybody until I get set."

"Got the goods on 'em, eh? Tell me a little about it."

"Nope. I ain't just sure enough yet, but I'll make yuh a little bet that by this time tomorrow everybody'll know who's been doin' all the stealin' and shootin' around here."

"That's worth a bet," smiled Trainor, "but the odds are all against yuh, Hartley."

"I'll bet even money," said Hashknife firmly. "I've got five hundred dollars that says I'm right. If you want to cover that amount—go ahead."

Trainor laughed and shook his head.

"Not until I know more than I do now. You seem to think you have a cinch, and I never bet against a cinch."

"No, it ain't a cinch, Trainor. I think I know who has been doin' the shootin'; and the man or men who have been doin' the shootin' are the same ones that have been doin' the rustlin'. Tomorrow mornin' I'm goin' to ask a few questions in Wolf Wells, and what I learn will either cinch the case against 'em or bust my theory entirely."

"Well——" Trainor turned back to the newspaper—"I wish yuh luck, Hartley."

"Thank yuh," said Hashknife and clumped down the steps, going to the bunk-house.

For a long time he sat on his bunk in the dark bunk-house, humped over with his elbows on his knees, thinking of what he was going to do. Piece by piece he knitted the elusive evidence together; his lean jaws

shut tightly, as he debated just what to do.

In all the years that he and Sleepy had untangled range mysteries and troubles, this was the most fiendish outfit they had ever tried to run to earth. The cattle stealing end of the thing was on a par with any rustling trouble, except the clever way in which it had been done; but the fact that three men had died from ambush; shot from behind, without a chance to protect themselves, while others had almost lost their lives, made it entirely different from anything they had ever encountered.

"They don't deserve a trial," muttered Hashknife. "Killin' ain't bad enough. I can forgive a rustler, but I can't stand for a dirty murderer."

Neither Buck nor Poco showed up that night, which was not surprizing, and Trainor rode away fairly early, after asking Hashknife if he was going to town with him.

Hashknife was in no hurry. He cleaned his six-shooter carefully, put on a clean shirt after shaving and took his time about saddling his horse. Then he rode away unhurried. At the forks of the road he turned toward the right, as if heading for the Tomahawk, spurring his gray into a gallop.

But as soon as he galloped around the first curve he reined off the road and pointed into the hills, circling toward where he had found the hidden rifle. Here he was forced to slow down to a walk on account of the rough going.

It was an ideal morning. The early morning mists were still rising up the sides of the gray hills; a meadow-lark warbled from the cottonwoods, and a flock of turtle-doves, like fast-moving shadows, hurtled past on their way to a water-hole.

The gray horse threw up its head in alarm when a long-legged jack-rabbit bounded from under a sagebush, jiggled a few times to loosen up its kinks and faded away into the protective coloring.

But Hashknife was not considering the beauties of nature just then. He rode very straight in his saddle, his six-shooter swinging loose in his right hand, while his eyes searched every movement on the brush-lined hills.

He was nearing the clump of trees in the little swale now, and the gray had slowed down to a slow walk. Once he drew up and made a motion, as if to dismount, but did not.

Suddenly a shot crashed out. The gray jerked back and Hashknife instinctively ducked. There was a brushy ridge between him and the shooter. For a moment Hashknife thought the shot had been fired at him, but the next moment came the spattering reports, as two guns opened a rapid fire.

Hashknife's first thought was that Sleepy had engaged the enemy. Forgetful of all danger to himself he spurred the gray into a lunging run and swept over the ridge and into the swale, circling wide above the clump of trees.

The tall gray hurdled sage and greasewood, like a born hunter. Suddenly a horse came sweeping into them, its rider crouched low. Both horses were running at full speed, crossing each other at almost right-angles.

Two six-guns spat bullets at almost the same moment, and Hashknife felt the hot sear of a bullet across the side of his neck. A swift sidewise glance showed the other rider sway in the saddle, but the next instant horse and rider swept out of sight.

Hashknife tried to stop his lunging mount, but only managed to stop it almost against the grove of cottonwoods. He whirled in his saddle and tried to catch a glimpse of the other rider, but in vain. The gray hills had swallowed him up.

A moment before, two wild riders had almost crashed into each other; both had fired with the intent to kill. Now a meadow-lark winged its way into the quiet swale and lifted its voice in song.

Hashknife felt tenderly of his neck and got stiffly out of his saddle. Lying just a few feet away was the .30-30 rifle and around it was scattered four unexploded cartridges.

Hashknife smiled grimly and climbed back into his saddle, leaving the gun where he found it. He jerked out the empty shell from his gun and replaced it with a fresh one.

Then he spurred into a gallop again and went straight for the spot where he had told Sleepy to meet him. And the faithful Sleepy was right there, fairly bursting to know the meaning of those shots.

"—— it, I stayed here," he wailed. "I'm never where there's anythin' goin' on. What and who was it, Hashknife?"

"Get on yore bronc and come on," ordered Hashknife and Sleepy lost no time in following orders.

They spurred down out of the hills and headed for town before Hashknife yelled back at him:

"Shake up yore old coyote-bait, cowboy. I just swapped lead with Poco Saunders and I want to beat him to Wolf Wells."

"Poco Saunders!" yelled Sleepy. "Didja hit him?"

"I hope not. I swapped before I thought."

"Hope not?" panted Sleepy, trying to urge his horse to greater speed in hopes of keeping up with the racing gray. "Why in —— do yuh hope not, Hashknife?"

"I'll tell yuh in town," yelled back the lanky one.

TRAINOR met the Lanpher family at the hotel. Carsten was with them, and they were anxiously waiting for news of the jury which had been locked up all night, battling out the fate of Ben Lanpher.

Many of the ranchers and cowboys were still in town, anxious to know the verdict, and the Lily of the Valley and the Antelope saloons had profited greatly thereby.

There was an air of utter despair about the Lanpher family. They realized that nothing short of a miracle could save Ben from paying the extreme penalty for the crime.

The fact that the jury was still battling for a verdict showed that some of the members were unconvinced one way or the other. Lanpher paced the short lobby of the little hotel, his lips twitching nervously, paying no attention to the words of comfort from Carsten and Trainor.

Mrs. Lanpher and Helen sat together, staring out of the dusty window, seemingly resigned to their fate, speaking to no one. Mrs. Cassidy, the squaw, and Lorna had stayed at the hotel, awaiting the verdict, and now they came down the narrow stairway, scanning the faces of the group, as though wondering what the morning was to bring.

Trainor spoke to Lorna, but she did not look at him. After a glance around the room she went straight to Mrs. Lanpher and Helen, who looked up at her.

"You worry too much," said Lorna softly, and then, as though imparting a great truth:

"Sleepy says to not worry. Everything come out right pretty soon."

Trainor and Carsten moved in closer.

"Who is Sleepy?" queried Mrs. Lanpher.

"Oh, just a cowpuncher," said Trainor. "He is a friend of Hartley, who works for us, Mrs. Lanpher."

"Just a cowboy?" Lorna spoke softly and looked straight at Trainor.

"That's all he is," Trainor seemed slightly angry, and turned away, as if to dismiss the argument.

Lorna turned to Mrs. Lanpher.

"I don't know why he says that everything will come out right. He says——" Lorna smiled softly—"that you'll always have good luck when you find a pinto horse."

"Pinto horse?" asked Lanpher, ceasing his restless pacing of the floor. "What about a pinto?"

Trainor and Carsten were looking at Lorna, but she did not turn away from Mrs. Lanpher.

"I do not understand," said Mrs. Lanpher. "How can a pinto horse bring one good luck?"

Lorna shook her head seriously.

"I don't know, Mrs. Lanpher."

Trainor laughed sarcastically.

"Indian superstition, Mrs. Lanpher," he assured her.

"That —— lie!" grunted Mrs. Cassidy blandly, and Trainor's face went black with rage at the retort.

"Well," Lanpher laughed shortly, "Mrs. Cassidy should be a judge of that, Trainor. Personally, I hope that a pinto is good luck. There doesn't seem to be much luck for us here."

Trainor bit savagely at his underlip and strode out of the door, with Carsten going out behind him. They crossed to the Antelope and disappeared. Mitchell, the lawyer, came in and sat down.

"Nothing from the jury-room," he said wearily. "They seem to be at odds over something. They are a hard-headed lot of cattle-men, and I feel that we shall get the benefit of any doubt. Still, our defense was so weak; so weak that the prosecution was content to send the case to a jury on our own evidence and plea."

Lanpher blinked painfully and walked to the door. Mrs. Lanpher was crying softly and Mrs. Cassidy was looking at her, with a face as immobile as bronze. Then she said:

"You lose boy—you cry. Mebbe I lose

husban'—I no cry. Too — much cry; not 'nough laugh."

Lanpher had been leaning out, looking down the street, and now he turned back to those inside the lobby.

"The jury has reached a verdict," he half-whispered, and there was a decided catch in his voice, as he added—

"We—we'll know it all very soon."

Lonesome Hobbs came puffing up to the door and nodded violently.

"They—they've agreed," he panted. "I—I guess they gug-got hungry."

He turned and bow-legged his way across the street to notify every one, while those in the hotel lobby went slowly down to the courtroom; anxious, but still afraid to hear what the decision might be.

The courtroom filled rapidly. Trainor and Carsten took seats at the table with the Lanpher family, and in a few minutes the sheriff brought Ben in the rear door. Ben was pale and appeared nervous, jerky. He sat down beside the sheriff and stared straight at the wall, ignoring the sheriff's attempt at conversation.

The courtroom buzzed with subdued conversation which ceased quickly when the gray-haired judge came in and sat down at his desk. The judge appeared tired and worn as he looked down at the prisoner and scanned the room.

Then with a slow tread the jury filed in past the judge and sat down. Every eye in the room was upon them, and they seemed carefully to avoid looking at the prisoner who, after a searching glance, bowed his head.

The judge rapped softly for order, and turned to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a decision?"

Caleb Hardy, a raw-boned cattleman from the west side of the county, got slowly to his feet, holding a folded paper in his two big hands.

"Judge, we have," he said slowly, the lines of his face deepening, as he looked at the paper. "Yeah, we have. It's all wrote out on this here paper."

He stepped slowly across the intervening space and handed it to the judge. The room was so still that one might hear the buzzing of flies on the window-panes, as the judge unfolded the paper and read it. For a moment he looked at the rear of the room, his eyes half-closed. Then he looked

down at Ben Lanpher and said softly—

"Ben Lanpher, stand up."

Ben glanced up at him for several moments before he got slowly to his feet, his hands resting on the table-top. The judge looked down at the paper and read aloud—

"We, the jury, find Ben Lanpher guilty of murder in the first degree."

The paper slid from his fingers and he shut his eyes, as if he did not want to see how Ben Lanpher took the blow.

Ben stared at him, turned his head and looked out across the silent crowd, his jaw set tight. Mrs. Lanpher began crying bitterly, and Ben stared at her, as if he did not understand what it was all about. Then he sat down and leaned forward on his folded arms, while the sheriff patted him on the back and tried to say words that would not come from his lips.

The judge turned to the jury.

"Gentlemen, is this your verdict?"

They nodded slowly, and the foreman said hoarsely—

"Judge, it was all we could do."

Trainor got up and crossed to Ben, offering his sympathy and hope; but Ben did not look up. Lanpher shoved Trainor aside and threw an arm around the boy's shoulder.

The room had been silent, as the audience watched every move of the main actors in the drama, but now there came the scrape of a footstep at the front door and Buck Avery came in. He started for the front of the room, but some one caught hold of him, whispering for him to be still.

But Buck struck the hand aside and started down the aisle, just as the rear door swung open and Hashknife and Sleepy came in. As intent as the audience was on the prisoner, they gave more than passing interest to these two cowboys, who had used the private entrance to get into the room.

Hashknife and Sleepy stopped near the judge's desk and looked over the room. Lorna and her mother looked at them and they both smiled. Buck had halted about midway of the room in the center aisle, as if undecided what to do.

"Ben Lanpher, stand up," said the judge hoarsely.

Ben did not hear him and the sheriff repeated the order. Ben stood up, his hand on his father's shoulder, and looked straight at the grave-faced old judge.

"Ben Lanpher, you have been found guilty of murder in the first degree, and it is the duty of this court to carry out that verdict. Is there any reason why I should not pronounce sentence upon you here and now?"

Ben looked away from the judge and down at his father.

"No," Ben shook his head. "I—I guess—not."

"There is a reason, judge."

Hashknife had spoken softly, but his voice carried to the far end of the room like a trumpet.

The judge turned and looked at him in amazement. Eph Baker, the prosecutor, was on his feet in a moment.

"I object to this!" he snapped. "What right —"

"There's a mighty good reason, judge," said Hashknife slowly, never taking his eyes off the crowd.

"If you'll let me, I'll tell yuh why. If yuh won't, I'll tell it anyway."

"I protest against this interference," insisted Baker, appealing to the judge, who was staring at the cowboys.

"Set down, you fat hoptoad," laughed Sleepy, and Baker's teeth snapped angrily.

"Well, it is irregular," hesitated the judge, "but —"

Mitchell was already on his feet and before the judge.

"Let him talk, your honor," he begged. "It is a God-sent interference, if they have evidence."

"Little bright-eyes over there is havin' a fit," said Sleepy, pointing at Eph Baker, who was struggling to swallow his anger.

Some one in the audience laughed cacklingly and a ripple of laughter followed. The Lanpher family were staring at Hashknife and Sleepy, as if afraid that something would interfere with their last-minute assistance.

"The court will listen," decided the judge, and there was evident relief in his voice.

"I'm sure much obliged," said Hashknife slowly. "We're sorry to be so late—but better late than never."

He cleared his throat and hooked his thumbs over his sagging belt, while Sleepy moved back until he was against the judge's desk.

"You've all heard about the Fantom Riders," said Hashknife, a half-grin on his lips.

There was a perceptible movement in the crowd, a shuffling of feet, the clink of a spurred heel.

"And you've all lost more or less stock," continued Hashknife. "It's been a mystery where them cows went to. The Circle Cross lost a lot of cows; so Mr. Lanpher decided to hire a cattle detective, and gave him work as a cowpuncher."

"The Fantom Riders killed him. They hired another. Pinto Cassidy is charged with his murder, because he was killed on the Tomahawk ranch. Yuh see," Hashknife grinned, "Pinto Cassidy drew a deadline between his ranch and the Circle Cross."

"Mr. Lanpher kinda run out of detectives. There wasn't much use, it seemed. The criminals got wise to 'em as soon as they showed up, and a feller ain't got much chance to stay in the game when men shoot from the brush."

"Me and my pardner—" Hashknife pointed at Sleepy—"We hired out to lay the ghosts. Nobody, except Lanpher, knew who we were. He hired us in San Francisco, and we sneaked in here without any brass bands. Not a danged soul knowed who we were—but they started shootin' at us right away."

Hashknife shifted his feet and his eyes narrowed a trifle. His smile was all gone now. Even Ben Lanpher had forgotten that he was a condemned murderer, and was watching and listening.

"They even mistook Jimmy, the half-breed, for me, and plugged him in the arm. They sure wasted a lot of lead and got little results. They plugged Sleepy once."

"I wondered how they spotted us so quick. I hired out to the Circle Cross, after Smoky Cole, the foreman, had been killed. Of course, Ben Lanpher was arrested for that killin'."

"I think I know why Smoky was killed, folks. Smoky was a hard drinker, a man who didn't want to be bossed, and he might—talk."

"Wait just a moment," interrupted Baker. "Is this all guess work on your part? If you have proven facts —"

"Set down!" growled Sleepy angrily. "You can ask some questions after he's all through."

Baker subsided reluctantly.

Hashknife laughed shortly and started to speak, but Sleepy interrupted with:

"Buck Avery, I wish you'd set down."

Yuh make me nervous standin' there in the aisle."

Buck snarled back a short answer, which was not intelligible, and a man moved over for him to sit down, but Buck ignored him.

"Go ahead, Hashknife; he won't set down—yet," said Sleepy, and Hashknife continued:

"Until we came here, nobody had ever seen the Fantom Riders. We seen him—on a pinto horse; so we had that much evidence. But nobody around here, except Jimmy, the half-breed, owned a pinto; and Jimmy's pinto had been stolen.

"The shootin' had all been done with a .30-30 rifle; but they all shoot the same size ammunition, which made it hard to prove which .30-30 fired the shots. Are yuh all interested in my story?"

"Keep weavin', brother!" exclaimed a cowboy earnestly.

"Well, I got to wonderin' about that dead-line," said Hashknife thoughtfully.

"Men don't draw deadlines just for fun; so I went on a still-hunt for a reason—and found it. Pinto Cassidy is in jail for killin' that detective on Tomahawk property, but he never killed him. It was a ——— easy thing to put that dead man there and lay the blame on the old man."

"Can you prove that?" asked Baker quickly.

"I can. But I reckon I'd better let yuh into the mystery of the stolen cattle. It started over a certain feller wantin' a girl. Her pa and ma didn't want her to marry him; so he decided to get even with pa and ma by bustin' up their herds.

"He got kinda stuck on another girl, but because she wasn't white, he wanted to love her, but not as a wife. It's things like that, gents, that causes dead-lines."

"What do you mean?" roared Trainor. "You mean to say that I——"

Hashknife ignored him, but Sleepy's eyes never left Trainor's face, as Hashknife continued:

"There was only one man who could have told that me and Sleepy were comin' here to work on this case. We met him in Lanpher's home in Frisco. He was the link to a weak chain of evidence. I needed him; so I got a look at a telegram down at the depot. Here it is."

Hashknife produced an old envelope and read aloud—

"Lanpher makes private shipment of one long one medium. Watch for them soon."

"That was the telegram I discovered, and I knowed it was the wire that caused us to be met with bullets. Then——" Hashknife shoved the letter into his pocket—"Then Jimmy stumbled on to the pinto. It was back in the hills in a brush corral, hidden away. The bushwhacker could switch horses there any old time. It sure was a clever scheme—while it lasted.

"Old man Luck was kinda with me and I found that .30-30 rifle, hanging in a tree; where it was easy to get, but hard to find. We had the pinto, the rifle, the telegram that put us in bad with the Fantom Riders.

"Folks, your cattle were never herded out of the Ghost Hills. They were loaded right into cattle-cars and shipped to market. They were loaded at night, shipped at night, and the crooked buyer falsified his reports, split the pot with a dirty coyote and his hired whelps.

"I know of three trains of Circle Cross cattle that were shipped out of Wolf Wells and the siding down the line; but Lanpher's reports show that only fifteen cars of stock were sold in one whole year. They ——"

"Look out, Jim!" screamed Buck. "They've got us, —— their hearts!"

Buck's gun flashed in his hand and his first bullet smashed into the judge's desk beside Sleepy. The roar of his gun punctuated his screaming admission of guilt.

Trainor had flung himself sidewise, between Hashknife and the jury, which proceeded to lie down, fall down or to get out of line in any possible way, while Carsten drew a gun, seemingly out of thin air, and flung himself forward only to be met by Sleepy's first shot, fired from his hip.

Carsten pitched forward, his gun spinning out of his hand, while over his falling body whistled the lead from Hashknife's six-gun.

Trainor, with bullets thudding into his big body, laughed chokingly through the smoke and tried to make his nerveless finger pull the trigger of his big Colt. Then he went down sprawling on his face, his right hand still convulsively gripping the big gun.

Buck Avery had whirled and run to the rear after his first shot. He was seemingly bewildered as to what to do, but when he saw both Carsten and Trainor down he sprang through the door out into the street, with Hashknife, Sleepy and the sheriff racing after him.

They reached the street, only to see

Buck vault into a saddle and whirl his horse around. Hashknife fired a shot at him, but it was a clean miss. Buck was swinging his six-shooter up and down, as if trying to shoot back at them, when a horse and rider came out from between two of the buildings near Buck.

It was Poco Saunders, swaying weakly in his saddle, his reins dragging in the dust. A six-shooter dangled in his right hand and he seemed about to fall from his saddle; but at the sight of Buck Avery he straightened up and drove home his spurs.

Straight at Buck he went, and Buck waited for him, both shooting as they came together with a crash. Buck's horse went down from the impact, and Poco fell from his saddle; the riderless horse falling half-way to its knees and stopping dead still.

Hashknife was the first to reach them. Buck was dead; filled with bullets from Poco's gun. They turned Poco over and bolstered him against Buck's body; while the crowd poured out of the courtroom and surrounded them.

Poco was not dead, but he was going fast. He tried to grin up at Hashknife, and his voice was weak, as he said:

"Shot at you by accident, Hartley—this mornin'. Get Trainor, if yuh can. He's the head of the gang. Carsten is another. I helped 'em steal cattle, but I didn't have anythin' to do with the killin'. They didn't trust me and Smoky, I guess.

"Either Buck or Trainor killed Smoky, my bunkie. Buck tried to kill you. That drinkin' was all a blind, I think. I followed you and Stevens to the pinto and I seen you find the rifle, I laid for Buck. The rifle wouldn't shoot."

"Poco, I'm sorry," said Hashknife. "I like you, cowboy."

"Thank you, Hartley." Poco looked around at the crowd and tried to smile. "I reckon I'm all through. They can turn Ben Lanpher and Pinto Cassidy loose now. I—I'm just a — rustler, Hartley; but I never killed from ambush. I can go clean. And I want yuh to know that Smoky wasn't in on the killin'. It was just Trainor and Buck."

"Trainor, Buck and Carsten won't do it again," said Hashknife.

Poco nodded shortly and lifted his head, as if listening, but his eyes were glazing fast.

"Somebody singin'?" he asked wearily.

"What are they singin' about, I wonder? Why, I know that song. Gee, that's —"

Poco smiled, but this time the smile did not fade. Hashknife straightened up, his lips shut tightly, a sadness in his eyes, as he turned to the crowd.

"They're all Fantom Riders now, folks," he said and turned away toward the Lanpher family near the courtroom door.

Sleepy was talking to Lanpher, as Hashknife came up, and in a moment Ben Lanpher joined them. He had been turned loose.

"Here's m' prize pup-prisoner!" yelled Lonesome, and they turned to see old Pinto Cassidy coming from the jail, walking alone. He was also free. Lonesome was behind him, grinning from ear to ear, and doing a burlesque war-dance.

"That's — good!" blurted Mrs. Cassidy hoarsely. "My man go home now."

"Sure, I dunno what it's all about," protested Cassidy, as Lorna threw both arms around his neck and her tears mingled with the stubble of his wrinkled face.

"My — I'm thirsty," choked a lean-faced cowboy, who had been on the jury. He turned away toward a saloon, and several followed him.

"Hartley, I dunno what it's all about yet," admitted the sheriff. "Danged if it didn't happen so quick that I never even remembered that I had a gun. Why, Trainor never even fired a shot. Gosh A'mighty, you two fellers sure do know how to make a gun hop."

The Lanphers surrounded them, trying to express their thanks but none of them could talk coherently. Ben shook hands with Hashknife silently and turned away to Lorna, who was with her father.

Lanpher was looking at them, as Hashknife touched him on the arm and spoke softly:

"Shoot square, Lanpher. This is between them."

"I know," breathed Lanpher. "It is not for us to say."

Mrs. Lanpher and Helen had moved in closer, watching Ben and Lorna, who were talking softly. Ben shook his head, as if not understanding. He questioned her anxiously, but she shook her head again and turned away.

Ben frowned thoughtfully.

"Will we be goin' home now, Lorna?" asked Cassidy huskily.

"Yes," she said softly, without lifting her head.

Ben looked at her for a moment and turned to his mother.

"She won't marry me," he said slowly.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Lanpher foolishly.

"She says she don't love me."

"— good reason!" blurted Mrs. Cassidy.

Cassidy crossed to her and put his arm around her; but she did not look up at him as she said:

"Love is such a little word, don't you see. It means today—not tomorrow or the next day. Ben wants to marry me today. His folks don't want him to marry me. He is willing to marry me in spite of them—today.

"I am half-Indian." She turned and faced them, her eyes half-closed. "Maybe the Indian half is the strongest. Ben would not love an Indian—tomorrow. And you will all be much happier. I want to be happy, too."

"— right!" exclaimed Mrs. Cassidy inelegantly.

"Well," Mrs. Lanpher gave a sigh of relief. "I'm glad it has all turned out for the best."

"Yes, for the best," said Lorna softly.

"But nobody has asked me what I think," complained Ben. "Haven't I anything to say about it?"

"Very little," said Cassidy. "Go on back to your town and settle down, Bennie. You've been a lucky lad to stay as long as ye have. Come, Lorna. Are ye ready, Minnie?"

"— right," said Minnie, "*Mamook klatawa.*"

Hashknife and Sleepy were watching Cassidy, Minnie and Lorna crossing the street, when Lanpher grasped Hashknife by the arm, yanking at him nervously.

"I'm still in a whirl," he declared. "It is like waking from a nightmare, don't you know it? Why, there isn't a man left on the Circle Cross. Four dead men! Can you imagine that?"

Hashknife nodded slowly, sadly. His face seemed to have aged years in a few minutes.

"Yeah, I can imagine it."

"Well, I don't know which way to turn."

Lanpher nervously fumbled in his pocket and produced a check-book.

"I promised you a thousand apiece,

didn't I? I'm going to double that. My Lord, it was worth three times that much. I—I mean, it is worth everything in the world to me."

Helen and her mother had come to them, and Lanpher turned nervously to them.

"I—I'm trying to pay my debts," he explained, showing them the check-book.

"In money?" asked Mrs. Lanpher.

"That's—right," Lanpher's voice softened and he shook his head.

"Not my debts, mother—my bills."

He started to write a check, but stopped and looked straight at Hashknife.

"Hartley, will you and Stevens accept half-interest in the Circle Cross, and handle my half for me?"

"No, I reckon not," he said slowly, apologetically. "Yuh see, me and Sleepy have got so much iron in our system that we'd kinda rust if we hung around in one place too long. Thank yuh just the same, folks. It's a fine offer."

"Will you come to visit us at San Francisco?" asked Helen. "Our home is your home now."

"When you have a dry season," said Sleepy. "Fog and iron don't go well together."

"Where will you go from here?" asked Lanpher, handing them each a check. "We want to keep track of you two."

"Keep track of us?" Hashknife smiled wistfully. "You'll have a job, pardner. We've been called the antidotes for poisoned ranges. We'll likely keep goin' until our medicine gets too weak. But we'll let yuh hear from us once in a while."

When Hashknife turned he found Sleepy grinning widely at him.

"What did Helen Lanpher mean, Hashknife?"

Hashknife grinned and rubbed his chin.

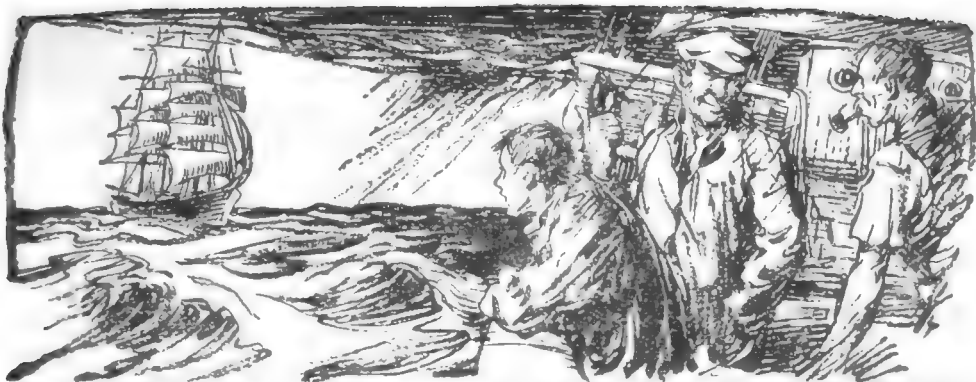
"I dunno," he confessed. "Did sound kinda funny. I wish it wasn't so danged drizzly in Frisco town."

"They have a dry season down there," said Sleepy suggestively.

"I s'pose. I'm havin' mine right now, cowboy. Let's bust these checks and hit the grit. I'm all fed up on tears, and I hate a quiet country like this. C'mon."

"It used to be a good country," sighed Sleepy.

Hashknife laughed softly, glanced back toward the hotel, and they rattled their spurs across the door step together.



LIVERPOOL to VANCOUVER

A Complete Novelette by BILL ADAMS

Author of "The Helmsman of the Harper," "The Petrels," etc.

FROM early childhood I wanted to go to sea; for, from the time my mother died when I was four years old, childhood was lonely. I was thereafter brought up sternly, beaten without pity and left in perplexity at all times. I wanted peace.

The first time I saw the sea was on a quiet June evening when I stood at the crest of a high cliff above a narrow river gorge. In the gorge, over the muddy river, floated what I took for pieces of paper.

"Look at the pieces of paper," I said.

The guardian of my childhood, beside me, spoke.

"They are not pieces of paper—they are gulls."

Turning away, she looked toward the river mouth and with an outstretched hand said to me—

"There is the sea—and a ship."

I saw the masts of a ship—I see them still today—at anchor by the river mouth. It was a peaceful evening. The sea, the ship, in some mysterious way seemed calling to me.

I spent much of my childhood near that river and saw the traffic which came and went with every tide from sea; craft of every rig and every nation. I woke at night to hear the sirens of the sea-bound vessels. From my little bed in an attic I heard sounds of a fantastic meaning. Often I was severely reprimanded because my lesson books were scribbled upon with pictures of ships.

Sometimes I walked beside the river and

saw ships close, seeing their sailors and hearing their sailor's voices; smelling the scents of the ships.

When I grew older I rowed in the docks and passed beneath the sterns of fine ships come rusty from sea, or beneath outreaching figureheads, at which I gazed; as though from their mute lips might be heard tales of the oceans. There were shark tails spiked to the boom ends of ships. There were scents of spice, of molasses, of rum, of timber from forests far away.

When I was eighteen I signed my apprentice's indentures with a Liverpool ship.

An apprentice paid the ship owner the sum of thirty pounds, English, and the indenture read thus:

The said apprentice hereby binds himself voluntarily to, and will faithfully serve for the term of four years, his said Master, his executors, administrators, and assigns, and obey his and their lawful commands, and keep his and their secrets, and will when required give to him and them true accounts of his and their goods and money which may be committed to his charge, or come into his hands . . . and will not embezzle or waste the goods of his Master, nor give or lend same to others without license; nor absent himself from his service without leave, nor frequent taverns or alehouses, unless upon his business; nor play at unlawful games.

IN CONSIDERATION WHEREOF, the said Master hereby covenants with said apprentice that during the said term he, the said Master, his executors, administrators, and assigns, will and shall use all proper means to teach the said apprentice or cause him to be taught the business of a seaman, and provide the said apprentice with sufficient meat, drink, lodging, medicine, and medical and surgical assistance, and pay to the said apprentice the sum of thirty pounds, in manner following, that is to say.

Six pounds at the end of the first year, seven pounds at the end of the second year, eight pounds at the end of the third year, nine pounds at the end of the fourth and last year. Twelve shillings per annum to be allowed for washing; the said apprentice providing for himself all sea-bedding, wearing apparel and necessities (except such as are herein specifically agreed to be provided by said Master). And it is hereby agreed that if at any time during said term the said Master provide any necessary wearing apparel or sea-bedding for the said apprentice, he may deduct any sums properly expended thereon by him from the sums so agreed to be paid to the said apprentice as aforesaid: and for the performance of the Agreements herein contained each of them, the said Bill Adams, and . . . doth hereby bind himself his executors, and administrators, unto the other of them, in the penal sum of thirty pounds."

Thus, having so bound myself to the owner, I was to go to sea to serve him for four years with no pay other than the thirty pounds I paid to him as my apprentice's premium; that to be repaid to me in four yearly instalments.

On many lime-juice ships it was the common custom to make life so unendurable to the apprentices that they would each and all desert her at the first port to which she came; their total premium moneys thus reverting to the owner as a fine clear profit.

Did an apprentice serve out his four years he was a valuable asset to the owner inasmuch as he saved the pay of a sailor in the forecastle. Eight good lads who had been to sea for two years would enable the ship to carry four fewer seamen than she otherwise would do. Eight lads with a three-years sea experience would dispense with still more men; saving the owner their pay. Thus, whether an apprentice stayed with his ship or deserted her the owner gained.

I took pen in hand on the counter of the owner's office, round the walls of which were hung models of his dozen fine ships. He looked amusedly to his pasty-faced clerk and said to me, smiling—

"Better read your death warrant before signing it, eh?"

I signed it; trusting, I suppose, a grown man to be square with a boy!—or too eager to get away to sea to care what came after I was there, perhaps. The clerk signed as a witness. I wonder if he still dwells today in some poor, squalid slum of Liverpool, still puzzled at the drabness of his meek existence! He smirked as he signed his name to my "death warrant."

The owner bade me "Come along—let's get down to the ship," and, reaching his hat from a hook, preceded me out of the office to the gusty street.

We walked in silence, wind piping from the sea, the streets busy with a seaport's traffic. Drays rumbled, horse-hoofs clattered on the cobblestones.

We passed through a warehouse gate and entered a great shed filled with merchandise. Then I saw her—my ship.

She lay at the dockside, her stern toward me, her bulwarks above the dock; her white half-round bright in the light of the dull morning. She seemed a sentient creature. Her name in golden letters faced me.

Before me stretched a full four years to be spent with her—a time almost beyond the ken of a lad's imaginings!

Aloft on her spars riggers were busy, getting her sail bent, ready for sea. Canvas flapped high above my head. Riggers shouted to one another in a jargon so unintelligible that I feared that I should never be able to acquire an understanding of their language.

There were ships ahead of her, and astern. Across the dock lay other ships. Over the roofs of warehouses a forest of masts towered toward the clouds. Here and there flags fluttered. Smoke blew windily from the funnels of the dock tugs while small craft hurried to and fro. Every one, everything, waited on the shipping.

 THE owner took me direct to the mate, a small-statured man who, standing beside the main hatch, stared aloft, shouting useless orders to the riggers. Their sole thought was to be done with the ship, that they might get on to the next. They worked fast and carelessly, cursing when the puffs bellied canvas from their grasp; longshore riggers who, once the work of fitting her out was accomplished, would leave and forget her, caring nothing what came to her thereafter. But the mate was her mate, to go to sea with her. Sensing something of this, I felt a loyalty to the mate, as to the ship herself. The ship was the incarnation of the dreams of all my boyhood years!

The owner spoke to the mate.

"Do you think you can make a sailor of this fellow, Mr. Polwarne?"

The mate turned patient eyes upon me,

large brown eyes; mysterious yes, in a mysterious face. He regarded me not solely as a boy about to go to sea; but rather as one more inexplicable part of the completely unfathomable puzzle of his seafaring existence. He could by no means have been divorced from his calling—a calling in which long afterward he was to die heroically—yet could not understand the why of it, and, failing to fathom the why of it, could not comprehend why others, similar to himself, should have been seduced from a peaceful life ashore to follow a mistress with whose bitterness he was already long ago familiar. He seemed to shrug his shoulders without actually doing so—the idea of the shrug being conveyed by the patient impatience of his eyes. He made no reply to the owner, who, turning away, left us together.

As he stared aloft again to the riggers the mate nodded to me.

“Abaft the mainmast,” he said.

Conscious that I was thus dismissed, I walked forward along the rope-littered deck until I came to an open door at the forward end of a steel deck-house directly abaft the mainmast. Within the door was a lad somewhat older than I, who, looking out, caught my eye and nodded.

Entering the deck-house, I looked about me at what was to be for four years my home. It was a tiny room, divided down the center by a partition; a small alleyway within the door with two other doors opening from it, giving entrance to the port and starboard compartments to either side of the partition. The outer bulkheads were rust-streaked. A small lamp hung in each room with, beneath it, a wooden table fixed against the outer bulkhead. Against the 'midship partition were two bunks, one above another, while two more ran cross-wise, or “'thwartships,” of the rooms.

Each room held in an after corner three small lockers one above another in which were scattered old white enamel plates and pannikins. Here and there lay oilskins and odds and ends of various kinds; bent spoons, old table knives, a leather belt tossed over one of the lamps, a tattered book on the study of navigation. The place was desolate and bare.

“Do you think you'll like it?” asked my companion.

He was a heavy-set youth with dense, straight black hair and with uncommonly

wide-open and deep-blue eyes. His clothes were good, bespeaking fortune in his family.

I replied evasively, saying that I thought that I should like it.

In days to be I was to see him wild with horror; utter fear in those huge eyes of his while with raw fingers he hauled upon the salty ropes in frozen far antarctic latitudes; to see him crawl aloft on spars that rolled above an ever hungry sea; to watch his clumsy movements while he fumbled with frightened fingers at the lashings of the sea-soaked canvas. I was to see him brood alone on tropic evenings while others smoked their cheery pipes and laughed and danced.

The sea was to overcome him, to send him mad. He was to be nauseated by rotten food, by evil-smelling pork, moldering sea-biscuit, bad water; to be cowed by merciless labors performed in intense heat, and again in frightful cold; to spend a year of torture while others watched him curiously as he snapped his thick fingers and uttered odd little cries, crazy laughter on his lips.

“Do you think you'll like it?” he asked me.

Other lads entered presently, carrying sea-chests and bags, and looked at us interestedly.

“Signed your indentures yet?” asked one of my companions.

“Yes, sir,” he replied.

“Don't ‘sir’ me; I'm no dog. You'd better hook it while the going's good. You'll be sorry if you don't,” he said, and added: “My name's Davids. What's yours?”

“Maider,” replied my fellow new apprentice.

“Well, you'd better hook it, old man,” said the other again, grinning in a friendly fashion at Maider.

The old apprentices, meeting now after a brief holiday from the sea, soon ignored us and fell to talking amongst themselves of their homes and of the voyage ahead. By nightfall there were six beside Maider and myself in the half-deck. Nothing in tales of old Arabian Nights, of old discoverer's voyages, nothing of which I had heard or read, no dream dreamed in the long years preparatory to my going to sea, could have compared with the vivid actuality of that night when first I sat amongst my shipmates of the old “Fast and Furious,” as they called the ship.

They laughed more than anything, treating the sea with a ripe contempt. One might have judged the sea to be a mere incident; that life consisted of fabulous meals in foreign ports where one obtained ample food and good for little pay. They spoke of girls whom they had met in Australian ports upon their previous voyage, and swapped tobacco; helping one another continually from each other's pouches. The half-deck became dense with smoke.

They tidied the rubbish of a by-gone voyage, and some hung pictures to the bulkheads of their bunks. They polished the lamp-globe and tossed new plates into the lockers. There was a dim suggestion of a place that might be home.

The mate peered in through an open port, his soft brown eyes expressionless save for that non-understanding patience in them. The old hands greeted him cheerily; for he had been her mate with them to and from Australia and the Chilean saltpeter ports upon her last voyage. Davids inquired for his wife and baby, and every one was silent while the mate gazed at us. With no verbal reply he nodded. His eyes, his face, were able to express thoughts without words spoken. We knew by his nod that wife and child were well.

"Had a good time of it?" he asked his questioner.

Before Davids could reply there was a bellow at the half-deck door, and the second mate strode in; a man new to all of us in the half-deck. He was bullock-built, with yellow curly hair and bulging eyes; his lips thick, his nostrils wide, his nose a little upturned at the end. His powerful hands were immense, his chest open and all covered with yellow curls. He stared directly at me.

"You'd moike a — foine possenger," he said.

I was embarrassed, feeling condemned; but he demanded a fill of tobacco from me and a match; then bandied older lads than I, who could reply in kind. He laughed loud as any, always a sort of contempt in his accents and his laughter. He sneered at the older apprentices, who spoke of girls, and spat through an open port. When about to commence a discourse upon girls himself the mate called to him to come to the deck, and we heard them walking aft together, discussing ship's affairs.

 WE WERE to have sailed ere dawn of the following day, but for some reason did not do so. At five of the morning, while it was yet dark, we were aroused by the boatswain, a dark-complexioned man with a sneering face; a foreigner from some European country. Behind his back we called him a Dutchman, though not venturing to do so to his face; for he vowed that he was of Liverpool birth and grew savage at any insinuation that he was not a Britisher.

It was a bitter cold morning of late February. One of the older apprentices fetched coffee from the galley, and for a few minutes we sat, sleepy and but half-awake, trying to sip the bitter, black fluid with which there was neither sugar nor milk. There was nothing to eat.

In a few moments the boatswain, coming to the door again, ordered us to the deck to wash the decks down. A dismal light was in the sky above the docks and shipping. Lights shone from galleys within which sea cooks prepared breakfasts for the inhabitants of their ships.

Save for Maider, my fellow new apprentice, we were all clothed in dungarees with knee boots. He stepped to the deck in a good "shore-going" suit, his silver watch and chain on, a pipe in his mouth and good tan shoes upon his feet.

A volley of oaths met him from the astonished boatswain, and, looking puzzled, he smiled back in friendly fashion, failing to grasp the situation. Some one shoved a deck broom into his hands, and at that moment the boatswain, throwing a bucket of salt water upon him, shouted to him to "turn to an' get those decks scrubbed down." He was given no time to change into working-clothes, and no one took further heed of him while we scrubbed the deck from fore-castle to poop as the day opened.

At eight we went below for breakfast, to sit again before the bitter coffee. There was a small dish of "dry hash"—a few meat scraps mashed up with some half-boiled potatoes and fried till all was brown; an unsavory meal. Maider sipped his coffee disgustedly and asked shyly why there was no sugar or milk; then relapsed into silence at his comrades' amused replies.

"You'll get your whack—and you'll get no more."

"She's a hungry old packet."

"There'll be no dry hash at sea. Wait till we're on horse and lime-juice."

We labored all day. Unused to work, I soon ached in every limb. My hands became blistered from hauling upon dirty and salt-crusted ropes; my arms feeling that they must soon be torn from their sockets. Maider, continually in some one's way, was forever being sworn at. Macranald, the second mate, and the boatswain, ordered us hither and yon; both ill-tempered at not being already at sea, now that their advance money was spent. No one minded Macranald's bluster too much; though all disliked the noisy boatswain both for his blustering manner toward us and for his fawning manner when in the presence of his superiors.

After dark that night the ship was moved to Toxteth Dock, the next dock to the stream; that she might be ready to pull out to the river and to proceed to sea when the tide was at the flood next morning.

No one went ashore that night, for we were all too tired.

The old hands sat smoking and talking, wondering why they were there.

When we were roused before the dawn again lanterns lighted the docksides, and the lights of a tug-boat gleamed on the water beside the ship; the tug's funnel indistinct in the gloom. Sharp voices called, and a chill wind blew. There were no stars. The crew came aboard, some of them half-drunken from a last carousal; these staggering about the decks, laughing or cursing, according to their varying dispositions. At daybreak we left the lock gates for the stream.

Just as we cleared the piers the owner arrived aboard and entered the cabin, the clerk at his heels again. In a few minutes, leaving the cabin, they walked forward amongst us.

"You'll all be captains when you come back," said the owner, and to me it seemed as though there were in his words a suspicion of derision.

He shook hands with the elder apprentices, ignoring Maider and myself.

The clerk held out a hand to Hickson, the oldest hand in the half-deck; but Hickson ignored it, and the clerk, looking at Hickson from fishy eyes, shook hands with Maider, whose face lightened at what he took for an exhibition of friendship. I

avoided the clerk, who seemed to fawn upon the owner; a mean-spirited youth. When he followed the owner ashore the oldest hand spat in the scuppers.

My initiation to the sea was swift and severe.

The day opened heavily overcast, a light breeze ruffling the gray sea. Save for one other square-rigged ship no craft put to sea that tide with us. That ship turned back toward evening to enter Holyhead harbour for shelter from expected bad weather. We stood on, the powerful tug-boat *Sarah Joliffe* ahead of us.

I heard the carpenter swearing beneath his breath; calling our skipper a fool to go to sea with such a threat in the sky. My limbs aching, my hands a mass of blisters, I wondered if it were going to blow.

It blew—the heaviest gale known for many years about those coasts. The gale caught us unprepared, with too much sail on, after dark had set in and several hours after the *Joliffe* had let go our tow-line. We were well to the south and eastward of Tuskar Light; a pitchy night in which the last shore light, on Tuskar, had looked foreboding as it blinked over the dull sea.

When the first squall struck her I was with Hickson at the foot of one of the poop ladders. He sprang for the ladder with a warning cry to me; but his cry was too late to save me from being caught by a boarding sea and carried from my feet. When I regained them and followed him to the poop I was wet to the bone in that cold sea.

It blew with hurricane violence, squall after squall striking her with a fierceness illimitable. Sail by sail her sails were snatched from their bolt ropes and torn to ribbons. They cracked with reports as of great guns going off along a battle line. The Old Man, whom I had never yet set eyes upon, bumped into me upon the poop and shouted to me to remain where I was; guessing me to be a new apprentice, of no use on the deck in such chaotic weather.

Long after midnight Hickson returned to the poop to strike her bell, and with him I started forward for the half-deck to go below. The darkness was outrageous, the sea sweeping her length continually. There were no life-lines stretched, and we had to dart from fife-rail to hatch, from hatch to house as best we might between the boarding waves. Twice I lost my foot-hold, to be soaked to the bone again.

We found the half-deck awash; water flowing level with the lower bunks when she rolled over, flooding the mattresses. Mine was a lower bunk.

Our sea-chests careened from side to side, tin plates and pannikins clattering amongst them. The two other boys of our watch were already there, and together we made a hasty attempt to secure our belongings, then rolled into our bunks. No uproar could longer have kept my eyes open.

While we slept, the last of her sails was blown away—the main lower topsail, directly above the half-deck. I alone of all her company did not hear its thunderous report.

Maider, when we rolled into our bunks, was seated alone, disconsolate, at the table in the other side of the half-deck. His three companions of the second mate's watch were gone to the deck to do what might be done; to help the men aloft in futile attempts to save the wreckage of her canvas, or to wait on the poop until the watch was over. When we were awakened once more at four o'clock of the morning, some three short hours after turning in, he still sat there, completely dazed, utterly dumfounded by the encircling fury of the storm. He was speechless, making no reply when spoken to; too astonished to speak.

Dawn broke desolate about us, the ship running under bare poles with wrath at her heels. Ribbons of canvas flew to the wind. The sea swept over her railing in constant cataracts.

Shortly after dawn we overhauled a ship with distress signals flying; a large Norwegian with, unlike ourselves, two sail still holding—her main lower topsail and her fore topmast staysail. Her other sails were ribboned like our own. Although her mizzen topmast hung in a tangle of wreckage over her poop, yet she was in better plight than we. Our Old Man, ignoring their appeal that we stay and take them off her, drove onward, sparing her nothing but a long, contemptuous look. We were powerless to help her, even had she needed help!

That night found us far up the Bristol Channel at anchor in Barry Roads, with several distressed and disabled vessels about us.

When we were once more called, dawn very chill along the eastern sky, the boatswain told us that the crew had refused

duty and that what work was to be done must be done by us.

I had seen but little of the crew and have no memory of them; save that Hickson had said them to be all Liverpool Irish and a fine lot of sailors. I saw but one of them well now, a tall fellow with a bright auburn beard and a merry face who appeared to be a sort of ringleader of his fellows of the forecabin. As they went over her rail to the deck of the tug that came to bear them shoreward to their trial for refusing duty he was the last to go from her. Ere he dropped from view to the deck of the tug he threw me a knowing wink, as though to say—

"Don't worry, boy, it's all in a lifetime."

I liked his looks; but never saw him again.

They went from the ship in what they stood in, with no other possessions whatever; neither sea-chests or sea-bags. Early in the gale the sea had smashed in one of their forecabin doors and, swamping their quarters, had carried out and over the side in the darkness every sea-chest and every sea-bag, every mattress and blanket, that any of them possessed. There was not left so much as a fork or knife or spoon to eat with, nor a plate to eat from.

In court they told the judge that they would far rather go to jail for six months than go round Cape Horn in such a bad sea-boat; so to jail they all went, and we heard no more of them.

For two full weeks thereafter we lay in Barry Roads while a 'longshore gang took out damaged cargo and restowed the cargo in her between-decks hold. We longed to go ashore; but were not permitted to do so. Of every one aboard her none save the Old Man went ashore. He went and came daily, while we envied him, wishing that the time might be when we too would be skippers—looking ahead through a mist of years till that hoped-for time could be!

Though in port and close inshore, we were fed precisely as would have been the case had we been at sea. We swallowed pea soup, salt pork and hardtack, and received neither fresh meat nor any vegetables.

Our work was endless and wearying. The boatswain ordered us about, taking evident pleasure in so doing, for well he knew that we despised him. We dragged

new sail from the locker and waited on the riggers and moved innumerable huge coils of rope and endless miles of hawsers from one side of the storeroom to the other with no apparent purpose save to satisfy the boatswain's desire to watch us labor. Each morning we scrubbed her decks from end to end and swabbed her paint-work; polishing her brasswork till it dazzled.

When at length, her new sail aloft, the ship was almost ready to go to sea, once more a great piece of good fortune befel us. The boatswain was made sailmaker and thus had no longer any power over us. The oldest hands no longer hesitated to call him Dutchman to his face. He sat all day when the weather was fine, sewing torn sails beside the fore hatch, or, if the weather were bad, under the forecandle head.

As the time drew near for her to go to sea a feeling of relief came to us; for nothing can be so wearying as to lie at anchor with a ship close inshore and yet to live as though one were at sea.

Maiden, who had not shaved since we left Liverpool, had grown a dense black stubble, acquiring thus the air of a forlorn sort of pirate: for he looked like no kind of man whom one might meet ashore, and yet unlike to any seaman. Through our stay in Barry he maintained a gloomy silence; listening to wild tales of sea disaster told in the evenings by the older hands. Had we been at shore moorings he would no doubt have deserted her.

While in Barry we benefited of course to the extent of having our "long night in," instead of working "watch and watch," four hours on and four hours off duty, day and night, as is the custom at sea. We looked forward to sea with no regret save that we must lose our full night's sleep.



AT LAST the day came when a tug-boat brought us a new crew; a tatterdemalion lot of deep-water sailors, some of whose faces and forms are almost forgotten to me; while others I remember as well as though it were but yesterday that they came over the side.

There was little "One-Eye," dour as a thirteenth apostle at first sight; heavily mustached, bowed in the leg though erect in the shoulder. As he swung himself over the rail beside the fore braces his face was turned to me. His one eye took me in, a smile widening on his many-wrinkled

visage. While I stood, somewhat fascinated by his peculiar and rather horrible appearance—for there was a grisly hollow where his left eye should have been—he dropped to the deck, and, rubbing his stubby paws together, stared aloft and alow.

"I 'opes she makes a long passidge," he muttered, speaking to me as though I were a man of his own age, an old acquaintance, instead of a pea-green apprentice with blistered hands and an ardor somewhat dampened by first exposure to the elemental furies.

Behind old One-Eye came big Alec—Sandy Alec as we knew him later; a spindly Scot from Aberdeen. He and One-Eye had evidently struck up an acquaintance already ere reaching the ship's side, for they assisted each other forward with their chests and bags; speechless comradeship apparent between them. Both were quiet men, given to long silences; though the little fellow was wont to explode at the facetiousness of younger men around him, warning them that they knew nothing as yet, but that the time must be when they would have to learn.

Few ever ventured into argument with little One-Eye, for his scathing tongue was no less terrible than was his solitary orb. Alec kept ever to himself, seldom talking to any one, and replying but briefly when spoken to. He struck one as of a somewhat different class, a little superior to the rest of the crew. When, as he seldom did, he sang out upon the ropes, one pictured a fireside far away in Scotland.

Two men followed Alec over the rail, leaping to the deck together; one a short fellow with a florid face and reddish mustache; the other rather tall and very bony; somewhat ruddy of complexion like his companion, but of a quite different mien. The taller of the two was named Thornton, and of all the many liars whom I have met he was the greatest. There was no tale too tall for him to tell, no lie too great for him to swear to. His pal Billings spoke less; but always acquiesced readily in all that Thornton said.

Their favorite theme was woman, especially such women as are apt to be found in the near neighborhood of the docks of any seaport. These women they took as their criterion of the sex, and it was ever their endeavor later in the voyage to draw some

young sailor or apprentice into conversation and to try to convince him that there was but one sort of woman in the world; that all the sex were alike when one got to know them well.

When they worked together their conversation rarely varied. Alone, at wheel or lookout, the trend of their thoughts was probably the same. Two more licentious and depraved fellows probably never trod the decks of a ship. With the half-deck they were from the first unpopular; though it was no uncommon thing to see them surrounded by several of their younger shipmates, who laughed immoderately at their fantastic tales and vile lies.

There were two other sailors who were friends; two of a very different type to Billings and Thornton. They were young foreigners from some cold Baltic port, and of about the age of the eldest of us in the half-deck. In a way they were of us; for youth must recognize youth.

Both were keen young sailors, eager to learn the secrets of their calling well; eager also to acquire a good knowledge of the English tongue. Both were shy, whether alone together or in company with other members of the crew.

Hans Ericson was a small man, alert and close-knit, dark of hair and complexion, his china-blue eyes childish as those of a young boy. Furst was taller, loosely knit, wider-featured and somewhat clumsy in his movements; his legs and arms dangling and awkward. Sometimes he laughed, which Hans Ericson never did; though often he sang out upon the ropes.

Even Macranald, opposed to all foreigners, was never able to find a fault with either of these youthful "Dutchmen."

There was an old, bent-shouldered, gray-haired man whose mustache gave to him the appearance of a left-over viking. His thin blue eyes were deep set in a much furrowed countenance; his teeth yellow with age and with tobacco-stain; his fingers as crooked as his frame. He was a sort of quiet-voiced oracle—a man who had gone to sea long ere any of us in the half-deck were born; who knew a hundred ships by the mere sight of their mast-heads above a sea-rim. Old Hansen was a Finn; but so long a sailor of the lime-juice ships that even Macranald could not call him "foreigner" now; a hairy, half-simian, wholly human man to whom the open sea

had ever been a home, a place where, if in any place, peace might be found.

There was a man named Towman, a raspy-faced Swiss, square of frame but sallowed and enfeebled by many a year of dissipation; by the diseases of the sea and shore. His left arm was scurvy-withered.

There were some half-dozen in her fore-castle crowd whose faces and whose figures are less distinct than are those of these others. They were men of many nations; though all speaking the English language more or less freely. Save for One-Eye, Big Alec, Billings and Thornton, all were foreigners—the customary thing aboard the lime-juice ships. Not all British crews would put up with such treatment as was commonly accorded to the type of foreigner who made the decks of British ships his home.

Many of them came aboard silently morose, the liquor still strong in blood and brain. Evening was drawing in. The mate bade them man the windlass. We walked the windlass round, heaving her anchor in to the wailed refrain of an apprentice's chantey—"Polly" Thompson the singer; the biggest of our half-deck gang, save myself. He was new to the ship, having sailed a year with a London clipper ere coming to us; a large, flat-footed, large-fisted lad, benign of face, with a sweet and musical voice that bore a strong note of youth's defiance in it; though tinged at times with that peculiar sadness that comes to many who follow the deep sea. He wailed our anchor chantey as the daylight faded, and the tug tightened our tow-line:

"Oh, Tommy's gone;
What shall I do?"

Skiloh, Skiloh Brown.

Oh, Tommy's gone;
Then I'll go too.

Oh, Tommy's gone to Hilo."

The moon shone from the center of a vast ring, behind a haze of cloud. Sailors stared aloft at that misty ring, muttering. The tug's lights danced ahead; the feet of the crew stamping in rhythm with the clank, clank of the windlass pawls, with the tune of "Tommy's Gone to Hilo."

Fast the shore lights faded from our view. Maider was below, down in the hated chain-locker, where, in the black bowels of the ship, he and an ordinary seaman flaked down the incoming cable—ready to run out again upon some far-off

day when she should come once more to anchorage in a distant haven. The night was cold, a little wind souging from the west and southerly.

The voices of men aloft casting her sails loose came to the deck with clear though muffled tones. The sea seemed ominous, the sky a threat. The men sang monotonously on the ropes, without lilt to their voices. Macranald bellowed, ordering men to "hop along," to "make it lively." The mate's voice, calling, "Be-lay," and "all right," or, "Make it fast now," or, "Loose that t'gall'n'sl," was steady, oddly imperative; as though it were the sea and ship to which he spoke as much as to the ship's company.

The chain all in, the anchors aboard, the tug let go and we were at sea once more, the shore lights lost in the night astern. The boys from the chain-locker rejoined us. Men looked ghostly in the faint, uncertain moonshine. Furst and Hans Ericson, keeping together, spoke in monotones of their home port save when Macranald, nigh them, bellowed his angry orders.

As though the big man were sobered by the presence of his superior officer the mates talked together quietly. The topgallantsails set, the watches were picked, the men sorted to the two mates; each mate trying to pick for his own watch those who appeared to him to be the most seasoned sailors. One Eye went to the mate, the mate's first choice. Old Hansen, ape-like as man-like, went to him at his next. Macranald took Thornton and Billings and the two young foreigners. Big Alec went, by an oversight on the mate's part, to him also. Towman, left till last, went to the mate.

There were days and nights thereafter for many days and for many nights when there was no variation in the weather; the sea continually gray, everlastingly somber. There was no sun by day. There were no stars by night. Clouds hung dense above us. Two of the apprentices of the second mate's watch fell seasick and so remained for many days; too ill to get to the deck, they lay in their bunks and at mealtimes nibbled the salty food as best they might; the ship meanwhile wallowing southerly.

My hands were raw; but since needs must, grew gradually harder. My fellow new chum in Macranald's watch went about his labors with a perplexed face. The older

lads jested and swore at all things with an easy freedom; laughing when any less agile than themselves were caught by boarding seas and washed about the tossing decks.



I WAS strangely lucky on that, my first passage down channel and bay. Day after day, night after night, passed, and no sea took me from my feet; though Maider was for ever wet to the bone.

On a night black as Erebus the mate ordered me to "jump along there and give them a hand with that sail," and I made my first trip aloft. Then I envied the two lads who lay seasick in their dry bunks.

The ship was rolling heavily when I started up the rigging. Everything invisible about me, I heard no sound save the sea's sounds. The wind drove hard upon me. I crept up very slowly and made my unaccustomed way over "the top"—where one climbs outward and upward upon one's back—into the topmast rigging; then on again toward the topgallantsail above, whither I was bound.

In the cross-trees I lost my foot-hold and swung, very high above the sea, in utter darkness. When I regained my footing my breath was coming in great chokes, and my arms ached. I continued my way aloft until, a boot striking me in the mouth, a sailor yelled a curse at me and bade me get out of his way. They had the sail already furled and were on their way down ere I had reached the yard.

"It's one o' they —— new apprentices," said a voice from the rigging above me.

I heard One-Eye's guffaw, and while he passed me by on his way down from aloft heard him mutter again—

"I 'opes she makes a long passidge."

I followed to the deck slowly and clumsily. Polly laughed at me, asking how I liked it aloft when I bumped into him as I dropped to the deck from the lower rigging.

I had not liked it too well, and the sailor's boot had left me with two loose teeth.

We beat southward for two weeks and more, seeing in all that time no star, no sky. At length a Sunday came—Sunday, that is for some mysterious reason so often the day when, after having sailed for many weeks or months alone on the great oceans, ships at sea meet with their unsuspected sisters.

Toward noon the weather grew lighter;

the gray mists rising in patches so that we saw lanes of rolling water where before had been naught save fog. As afternoon drew on it lightened steadily, and the breeze grew less chill. I was upon the poop when as a dog-watch bell was struck a voice cried—

“Sail on the starboard bow, sir.”

Every one hurried to the rail to see the first ship that we had met since leaving Barry. She came toward us, a home-flying water-bird with white feathers spread to the favoring wind. The sun, breaking sudden through a cloud-rift, shone upon her, then upon us; so that we lay, two ships alone together, passing one another, the homeward- and the outward-bound, in a sun-patch on an illumined sea.

Her sailors gathered in her shrouds to watch us by. We swarmed to our top-gallant rail to stare at the homeward-bound—we with the Horn before us, six thousand miles away!

Her name was plain—*Yarana*, with the rust-streaks running from its faded letters to the sea below. Her rigging shone, her paint-work bright and clean—a home bound ship prepared to enter port, a credit to her tribe.

Cheers rang over the sea from ship to ship; the *Yarana* ringing the outward-bound upon her long, wet way. We cheered them homeward, waving our hats and hands; our eyes filled with longing; our hearts with desire at sight of her grace. In the throats of some of us, the young men, there were lumps—lumps that spoke of things indefinable in human speech; of intense longing, of happiness in the vision of home-faring beauty at the end of long voyaging; of loneliness upon the water's face; of joy that the sun had broken the rifts away, that the sea was become blue.

To the southward the weather grew rapidly clearer; while to the nor'ard the gray mists drooped low, driving northerly before the wind, enveloping our sister so that she became dim in the canopies of fog, until we saw but a tall wraith with the foam at her counter. In a moment she was gone, and we were alone again upon the sea.

By sundown we sailed blue waters, the sky equally blue, a light wind on the beam. We, the apprentices, sat talking cheerily upon the spare topmast that lay lashed beneath the starboard fore-braces. Maider's face was thick with heavy bristles now,

for he had not shaved since leaving Liverpool—over a month ago. Questioning him, Hickson, the oldest hand, elicited the stupendous fact that he had expected to find both a barber and a laundryman aboard a lime-juice ship! The older apprentices were too astonished to laugh, and stared at him, incredulous that any one could be so innocent of the life of a deep-water man.

Hickson offered to shave him, and Maider gladly accepted his offer. We gathered around while Maider, seated on the spare topmast, was shaved by the oldest hand. Hickson shaved the right side of his face, the left side of his mustache; then as though tired of his job remarked, “We'll finish it up another time,” and put his razor and brush away.

Maider stared at him, unbelieving.

From the bridge came the shrill note of the mate's whistle for an apprentice to go aft to do some trifling job that must be attended to.

“Your turn to go aft, old man,” said some one, and aft he went, resembling a razored scarecrow of the sea.

The Old Man's wife gazed at him, unable to control her features; the Old Man himself staring speechless at the odd apparition. He returned forward crimson in the face, tears in his huge eyes, and begged Hickson to finish shaving him; but Hickson lay reading in his bunk, in no mood to be disturbed again in the precious dog-watch. Davids lent the luckless lad a razor, and, trying to shave with the ship rolling, he left his face resembling a battle-field.



AFTER that Sunday we held a leading wind for many days, and entered a steady trade. Excepting for the food life was pleasant enough. One by one we sent down her storm sails, to replace them with light, weather-worn canvas suitable for the trade winds and the tropics; the sailmaker a very busy man now at all times. He had a way of staring up from his work suddenly, looking round as though to see if he were watched; an odd, self-conscious expression in his eyes—an expression of a sort of guilt; as though he feared to be found out in something.

The time came in a day or two when we sent aloft the first of the many sails that he had repaired. It was a mizzen top-gallantsail, and a miserable misfit. No matter how we sweated up the halyards,

how tight we boused down the sheets, we could not take the many wrinkles out of leech and belly.

From the bridge, directly below the crinkled sail, the Old Man glared up at the one-time boatswain's handiwork. His face was rage personified; his eyes glowing coals set in a deep, hot grate. His thin, sharp-pointed nose seemed to quiver in his angular Nova Scotia face.

Old man Hansen, staring aloft at the mizzen topgallantsail, derided the Dutchman to his face, laughing with a hoarse, dry cackle in his hairy old throat. The Old Man's eyes, flashing angrily, rested on the two men beside the after hatch.

On the deck the word was passed from lip to lip that Hansen was a sailmaker, and big Macranald took it to the cabin. Hansen was called aft to see the Old Man. He was made sailmaker, while the unfortunate one-time boatswain was reduced to the forecabin.

Thereafter while the Dutchman took a place in the mate's watch old man Hansen sat all day at the hatch, palm and needle busy, stitching sails with a contented face. His day done, he joined us by the hatch, and, a pipe in his mouth now that there was no canvas for its ashes to fall upon, told strange tales—a talkative old sailor who had wandered wherever ships might go. Whalers, sealers, clippers or coasters, all were one to him. He may have lied, have fabricated some of the tales he told to us; but if so he did so unconsciously; himself believing and enjoying every tale he told us though in the telling it may have become, through much telling, distorted.

None of us ever knew his age; but he must have been a very old man. When he stood at the wash deck-tub of an evening to wash himself we saw that his naked back was thickly covered with a heavy growth of long white hair, almost as long as the hair upon his head. Often when we set sail he lent a hand unbidden, at the halyards; his voice hauntingly deep, seeming to hold in it music stolen from the hilltops of the sea.

We sailed through the tropics slowly, with a light trade. Each morning we scrubbed her fore and aft and swabbed the paint-work. We in the half-deck took our turns at "Peggy"—Peggy being that apprentice to whom it falls for a week at a time to remain in the half-deck when the

decks are scrubbed for the purpose of scrubbing the half-deck itself.

It was Peggy's business to see that the lamp was filled with oil—oil invariably got from a ship's carpenter, who doled it out with begrudging hands; knowing that he must answer to the Old Man for every pint of oil used on the voyage. It was Peggy's business to fetch the meals from the galley when the mealtime came; as also to go aft of a Monday evening to receive from the steward the week's dole of canned marmalade and sugar.

One windless afternoon I sat with Davids on the boom end, fishing for bonito; her cutwater bright beneath us, her canvas snowy overhead. Suddenly Davids spoke, apropos of nothing.

"It's — off the Horn."

His words gave me a chill, for in my mind's eye I at once saw terror on the sea, with indistinguishable bergs and a white fog that broke no rifts in its slow driftings, while black winds howled above a plutonic sea. Till Davids spoke the Horn had been but a dimly thought-of part of the voyage, still very far ahead of us. Now it took sudden and somber shape determinedly; never to quite fade again till we were past it.

The rust spots on her railings and her houses were scoured until the metal shone; then painted with several coats of red lead. Her decks were holystoned and rubbed with a mixture of hot oil and tar to help against the slippery sea-growths that might collect when she came to wild latitudes. When out of the tropics we once more sent down her old canvas, replacing it with storm sail—with yellow, board-hard, knuckle-breaking canvas for the Horn.

The ship lost her swan-like appearance then, losing the snow-white sails that had been bleached in many a doldrum down-pour. She seemed now more like a great wind-hovering sea-fowl south-flying to try her great wide pinions out.

We passed the river Plate with squally nights and sulky days, with terrific thunder storms and rain in torrents; then brought from the between-decks hold her weather boards and lashed them fast around the taffrail to hold back the waves from breaking on her poop in the days just ahead. After that we met a wind from the southward on a cloudy morning. It blew bitterly cold, and we shivered; eating hungrily when noon-time came from the

poor allowance of salt pork and salty pea soup. That night when the weekly stores were served out and every man received his seven days' allowance of sugar we found in place of the customary canned marmalade, margarine—a solid mass of hard yellow grease in a corrugated blue can, somewhat rancid to the taste.

We had ceased to go barefoot and now looked to the buttons on our clothing, sought out our heavy socks and tried our steering-mittens. In the tropics we had begged linseed oil from the mates and had oiled afresh our weather-worn oilskins, hanging them on lines to dry in the wind and sun. We dubbed our knee boots.

There was no sitting on the hatches of an evening now, no sleeping on the decks by night. We were glad to roll into our bunks and to draw the blankets tight about our chins, the ports fast shut, the door closed against the watchful-seeming seas that toppled the rails. She took a fine leading wind once more and raced southward, speeding with yellow canvas tight.

The seas grew darker below her, the skies darker above. She shook herself, and under topgal antsails, straining, burrowed her nose in the sea; tossing high water to the foot of each of her head sails. There seemed proud music in her going.

Maider, shivering, suffered. In the tropics he had been left much alone, allowed to do deck-work, and never sent aloft. Macranald had been easy on him.

Now with the end of the world to be approached, the weather to be barbaric, every man must do his share, lest some other bear an unequal burden, and he was no longer spared; but was sent aloft by day and night to help furl, or to loose, sail, or to do work in the rigging. He went aloft trembling, his face blank, his eyes haunted. Never talking, he sat silent in the half-deck while we smoked and sang.

On deck he was constantly overtaken by the small disasters of the sea. The ship could not take a green sea aboard but that he must be somewhere near and be beaten from his feet by its onrush, to be soaked to the skin ere he regain foot-hold. He was clumsy on his feet; lacking spring, as he lacked grip with his hands. Crawling up the rigging, he came down crouched within himself, terrified of the wind's wild freedoms in the canvas. We, who were grown used to him, took little heed of him save

now and then when he was overtaken by some more than usually big sea or when he was more than commonly alarmed aloft. Then some one might laugh out loud; but his face remained unchanged, for he was beyond the sting of human ridicule. The ship, the sea, the elements, ridiculed his every movement.



THERE came a midnight when the wind howled, and we hurriedly shortened sail. Unseen seas lifted her high, so that she fell quivering to their hollows, while surges, uplifted about her bows, scattered their upflung sprays over her fore-castle head and fore deck. We were off the Horn.

It was now that the individuality of the men asserted itself. They came to the deck lashed up in oilskins, the older hands appearing to be collected, quietly prepared for a struggle. One gathered from their aspect that the struggle was an old tale with them; that they were ready, and would be patient.

One-Eye rubbed his fists together, smilingly content. It mattered naught to him if she spent a month down there, beating her life away in the great Horn seas, struggling westerly against incessant hurricanes.

He never shivered. He was stolid. When he sang out upon the ropes his voice sometimes bore a suspicion of humor in its tones. Hearing his gruff guffaw in the darkness, one knew what he was thinking—

"I 'opes she makes a long passidge; I'm goin' to save me pay-day."

He was often the first man aloft, the last man down; never for an instant a shirker. At the wheel his gaze was fixed unwaveringly upon his compass; his face blank. The raging sea drew no word or gesture from him; naught save a ripe contempt. He was an amphibian, an old turtle, a protégé of whales.

Big Alexander, over six feet tall, seemed a yellow wizard arisen from the sea. In his stiff oilskins he towered above our little Jonah. Bright of eye and thin of feature, he was silent as the little man, confident with the same confidence of knowledge and of hardihood; seeming to patronize the sea and her uproar. His work was done with the utmost finesse; his fingers careful as those of a woman, and finely skilled. Never jesting, he was a sandy, sphinx-like wizard

who, when asked, gave advice unwillingly, with weighed words.

Thornton and Billings took their part; both good sailors despite their proclivity for lies. They worked together, side by side; Thornton working always impatiently as though eager to be done with whatever lay in hand to do. Billings worked in an easy fashion, so that one might have expected his complacency to annoy his ever impatient comrade. Neither shirked the worst place at the braces, or aloft. There was no time now for talk of the 'longshore women; nothing but the severe business of the sea in hand. One forgot their unlikableness seeing their fine seamanship.

Towman, unable to keep his feet upon the deck, his knees knocking from weakness, stayed in the forecabin, to stare from a port at us with bleary, hungry, wonder-stricken eyes whose lids were red; their rims inflamed. His head shook a little from side to side, his lips doddering at us while we hauled on the gear without the forecabin. A man short off the Horn is a man short, and we often cursed him under our breaths for his insufficiency; the sea-port's victim knowing that we did so—as many a time in years bygone he had doubtless cursed some other failing derelict.

When, now and again, he essayed to come to the deck he staggered, trembling, and we avoided him—a leper in the berg region.

The two young foreigners gave the ship all they had, and served her well; uncomplainingly; so that Macranald often threw them a cheery, jestful curse; whereat they took heart and further encouragement, and, answering his challenge, threw themselves yet more fully into the fray. We were well officered that voyage.

Old Finn Hansen, his sail-needles and twine all laid away, came forth lashed up at wrist and ankle in heavily oiled black oilskins and sou'wester—the sole black suit amongst our yellow ones. Cold as the sea herself, he stood to the sea, equally fearless. He went aloft and grappled with the rest of us at frozen topsails, his sunken eyes bidding us to boldness by the very cold light in them. No sea ever caught him to knock him off his feet. He took wheel and lookout with the rest of us, unbidden. If there were blood on his knuckles he told no one; but hid them under the sleeves of his old coat.

Save for Towman and the one-time boat-

swain the crew faced the Horn's mad music well. He, the Dutchman, kept to his bunk, day after day, malingering; vowing that he had so hurt his back while on the fore topsail yard that he could not move. He called it a sprain, and winced whenever he thought that any one was watching him.

The mate talked with him in a cold, contemptuous voice; so that the one-time boatswain must have known that all men knew his play. The skipper went forward to the forecabin to visit him, to see what might be done for him with medicine, and after the fashion of the lime-juice ships prescribed the one invariable remedy that is used for all complaints. The Dutchman gulped Epsom salts in tumblerfuls from tin pannikin. He grew alarmed, and looked ever more and more guilty. Men ceased to speak to him, and he lay in his bunk ignored while outside his mates fought the thunder of the Horn; doing his share and Towman's as well as their own.

In the half-deck Davids was conspicuous for his smiling face. By day or night, aloft or alow, storm or lull, he had a laugh and a joke on his lips. Jestful, he tried to bring some expression to Maider's doleful features. Beating his hands against his sides, he stamped his feet and blinked at the high seas that lifted beyond the railing. He held out a promise of fine weather to be, when he would once more dance beside the hatch and sing our choruses. The brutal cold, the ceaseless uproar, had no effect upon the little Welsh apprentice.

Hickson was of another kind; pompous, assertive and possessed of an unvarying conceit. If he laughed there was a sneer in his laughter, sweetness absent. He sneered at the wretched Maider, at me, at any one who was for a moment overcome by the terror of the seas. Constantly he was the first to leap into the rigging for the furling or the reefing of sail; his agility aloft almost simian. He knew no fear whatever, but, boasting, spoiled himself for us all.

We regarded him tolerantly, knowing that what he possessed in physical courage he lacked in mind; a brainless shipmate to whom the thought of his examination for second mate was a trouble. Smart though he was, and fearless, no one greatly liked him. One gained no confidence when working beside him.

Polly shouted on the ropes, secure on his big feet, and swore at the ship—son of a

famous skipper, and skipper to be. An immense lad beside the Welshman, he was equally cheery; though his cheer was of a more windy and defiant sort.

Long though some of us might to funk the grim winds and the freezing weather, they must be faced, and the battle fought out. The Horn seas thundered. There was ice upon her rigging. Snow froze to her spars. Her royals and topgallantsails, furled for weeks together, were sheeted with Winter, icy, so stiff that to loosen them it was necessary to beat them with spike or hatchet. Save for the countless sea-fowl she was alone, with no ship to bear her a brief hour's company in her beat about the stormy cape.

The birds were myriad, of many kinds. Albatross hovered above her railings, peering down at us—weird bipeds on her sea-washed deck. Pigeons encircled her, and molly-hawks without number. Petrels dipped in the sea furrows, small black sprites of disaster seeming to follow us with some set purpose, close under the stern by day and by night.

Ice birds, faintly blue, passed like iridescent clouds above the sea, wheeling in thousands around and around her. Save for the horror of cold, the hunger, the pain, the world was most majestically beautiful.



ON A NIGHT when the gale died lanterns were lighted. The night was intensely black, soundless save for the moaning from below far-off sea-edges, whence gales were again to advance upon us. In that mysterious silence we scrubbed her decks at midnight; throwing sand upon the planks. For days past footing had been insecure owing to the slimy sea-growths that had settled beneath the mizzen rigging, and by the main hatch. Men moved on noiseless feet, their deck-brooms swinging to and fro, fore and aft—a ghost company. We were too tired for jests, for any laughter. Davids was in the second mate's watch, with Polly also. We had no jester with us.

When we turned into our bunks it was to roll within bedding long since soaked by the sea; our every rag of raiment wet. We were young, and, though suffering, took no harm. Our hands were split, "sea-cuts" in every joint of the fingers and palms, red flesh showing through the toil-thickened skin. When we slept the cuts healed together, to agonize us when at our awaken-

ing they must be opened. We rubbed our hands with salt-pork grease and bound them ineffectually in old pieces of rag.

We grew accustomed to an order frequently given at the changing of the watches for the night. "Turn in all standing," and, going to our bunks, rolled into them as we were, lashed up at waist and wrist and ankle in our oilskins, our sou'westers on our heads—"all standing"; prepared to run to the deck again at a moment's call. To remove our clothing became a luxury.

Maider endured torture. With wide-split hands he was compelled by the necessity of life to grasp and to lay his weight upon ropes on which the sea was frozen. His face was horrified in that relentless weather.

Storm after storm shrieked from the westward. We lived aloft, setting sail in brief abatements of the gales, to furl it again immediately.

We "wore ship," turning to another tack with her stern to the wind and sea. She raced them, her railings rolling under, her whole deck submerged. The life-lines were crowded with clinging men who glowered at the unsated sea.

The mate walked quietly amongst us, the soul of patience. Macranald shouted and damned, defying sea and wind with blustering tones. Stringing oaths together as children string beads, he flung them at the tempests. Knocked from his feet by boarding waters, he arose to leer at sky and sea, his teeth set in a sneer. When his sou'wester blew away he worked bareheaded in the driving snow, his curly yellow hair blown back from his large forehead, and led us in a chantey chorus.

Despite snow, wind and sea confidence grew in the young men about him. His oaths were the expression of an unquenchable spirit. His rough culture was sweet-fruited. Using the name of God, he gave God great service fearlessly.

One-Eye he damned to his face, calling him all the names of the seaports: hailing him as "Jonah." One-Eye returned his stare with an unblinking orb; as though he thought—

"Wait—y'aint savin' yer pay-days yet; but wait!"

There was a strong comradeship fore and aft. We served dangerously a mistress who was terrible.

How in those days men subsisted on the abominable food of the lime-juice ships I do not know. We went below from snow-beaten topsail yards to miserable meals of hardtack and unsweetened coffee. Often it was necessary ere putting the hardtack to our lips to knock the weevils from it. We sipped pea soup that was almost too salt to swallow, slacking our thirst from the rusty water-tank below the lockers. We gulped rancid salt pork, tossing much of the small allowance served to us to the sea-fowl.

Twice a week we mouthed the untasty dish called "Harriet Lane,"—offal of the Queensland slaughter-houses put up for sailors of the lime-juice ships. On Saturdays we received a little boiled rice, dirty, half-cooked, soggy. We were always hungry, always cold, always wet. Yet the ship must be brought round the cape to her destination.

I lost count of days, then of weeks. It mattered not whether it were Monday or Sunday—save perhaps that on Monday we received our weekly allowance of sugar and of margarine; to be ravenously devoured that evening; a mere half-pannikin of each, supposed to last a full week.

 THERE came a day when after two full weeks of gales we caught a glimpse of a dim shape to the northward and gathered at the rail to stare. Old Hansen spoke, his head hunched in his shoulders, his hands drawn up into the sleeves of his oilskins.

"Ol' Stiff."

We stared at Old Stiff—at the Horn. Then ere noon the wind drove upon us from the westerly once again with almost wilder fury than before, and the land was lost to view while we, back-beaten to the eastward, fought in darkness.

Again two weeks passed by in which we saw nothing save mountain seas and wide vales of gloom; the ship forlorn. It seemed that it were doomed for all time to beat into the gales of the antarctic.

The snow, driving by us, bore within it very cries of unseen birds. Ice and snow gleamed on shroud and backstay. The sails were board-hard. Our knuckles were raw from tearing at the frozen canvas, the "sea-cuts" unhealed. Rolling into our wet bunks, we thanked God for a few hours' oblivion between the hell-furies of His world's end.

Maiden, white faced, horror-eyed, piteous, stared while we clewed the topsails up. When the second bellowed to him to get aloft and lend a hand he stared back from vacant eyes; as though he were a body in whom no spirit longer dwelt; as if his mind were dead.

Dauids cried to him. "Come on aloft—you'll be out of the sea, old man," and, shaking his head, Maiden was knocked down by a sea, to be swept to and fro, clinging despairingly to a life-line.

We ignored him. He never spoke, and we had no time for speech with any save one who was of us, and of the ship. He asked no questions, taking it for granted that this was to be existence henceforth until the end.

After two weeks once more, two weeks of implacable hootings from the westerly, weeks in which the gales and sea-mountains to the eastward jeered at and made jest of us, we gathered at the starboard railing, by the lee fore braces—now a full four weeks off the Horn.

"Old Stiff"—a dark shape arising from black water to the nor'ard.

The wind fell away that day, the sea became calm. Birds rested on mirror waters, their wings folded. A school of whales clove by, the birds rising to make way for them. The world was somber, the sky high and drear.

The calm lasted all day and on into the night. Shortly after midnight a breath stole out of the eastward, and the ship seemed to draw a long breath, as though coming out of suffocation. In illimitable night we made sail giving her her upper topsails, topgallantsails and topmast staysails. Her bow to the westward, she stole away.

When day came the sky was high, a fine breeze blowing, the cape lost to view. Far to the southward lay a great berg, clear-cut against the weather. Fore and aft, from forecabin to poop, a new spirit reigned.

Ere midday we saw a group of rocky islets and the word went round—"Diego Ramirez."

We stared at the Diegos' which, could they speak, might tell of many a fine ship broken on their merciless buttresses. The sea was pleasantly white-capped, a gentle wind bearing us onward with full sail set.

Toward evening a speck of white appeared far to the westward, and we crowded to the forecabin head. There was a new

lightness in the sky, a brightness we had not seen for many a day. We were forgetful now of hunger and sea misery, happy with a fair wind in her sails. Clothing was strung on lines from stay to stay, the whole fore-part of the ship become a drying-place for her seamen's wet belongings.

Out from the westward rose the white sails of a "homeward-bounder," and we stood beneath our outstretched clothes-lines to watch her by. The wind fair for each of us, each carried full sail, each making haste through the evening sea, hoping for "luck," for a fair wind to hold us long. We saw her name, *Aladdin*, just discernible in the falling light of day; seeing at the same time her bright lamp lit, a green light upon her starboard bow—a little magic light that glimmered on the sea, making our breath catch. Our signal flags flew, telling *Aladdin* how long we'd been at sea and whither we were bound.

"She's from the Colonies," said Macranald, "she's making a good passage."

We saw her sailors in her fore shrouds and very faintly heard their cheers, cheering the "outward-bounder" on her way, and we waved hats and hands, cheering her back again, wishing her luck and a swift passage home. Some, the younger of us, feeling a lump in our throats—a lump that told of things indefinable in human speech; of such intense longing; of happiness at the vast sea's beauty; of loneliness upon the water's face.

The "homeward-bounder" was gone, *Aladdin* lost in the shadows of night toward the Horn, dipping to the eastern rim of the sea, speeding on a glad way.

Night fell and we were alone upon the sea.



ALL night we kept full sail upon the ship, and on into the next day. The luck had changed at last. The wind grew stronger, but we carried everything and ran. The sea rose, higher and higher, till she raced with her rail down. The wind hauled a little to the southerly; and, taking it upon her quarter, she threw her heels high. We came on deck without our oilskins and, free of that cumbersome clothing, moved nimbly and shouted to one another at our work.

"Look at her go; —, *look at her*," said Macranald, his yellow head tawny and bare, a sort of great subdued unconscious reverence at her beauty, at God's beauty, in his

voice; his bulged eyes shining with delight at sight of a ship with the wind free.

One-Eye rubbed his hands together, staring disconsolately at the foam she flung about her; at the tight bellies of her drumming wings; at horizons that flew astern mile upon mile.

"My girl's got the tow-line," said Davids.

Maiden stood open-mouthed, his face blank. Now and then he clapped his hands together and made strange little jumps, leaping with both feet.

"The loon—'e's crazy," said Chips, the carpenter, staring at him.

Ice, snow, tempests, hunger and sea misery had broken Maiden's balance. He was voiceless in the half-deck, mute upon the deck, save when, clapping his hands, he leaped in the air.

Day after day the ship raced, never a sail taken off her. The wind, though strong, held steady. The weather grew warmer. Sea-fowl following, wakeful as the flying ship herself, knew no rest. As she ran northward they became ever fewer, till but a few albatross were left, with many cape pigeons.

There came a night when she burrowed her railing deep, a piping breeze on her starboard beam. Her decks awash with warm water, she shook as squall after squall struck her. All her sheets cried loud, every halyard strained; her royal masts bending as they had never bent to any wind when they were trees along a mountainside.

The sea gleamed in the darkness. Her stern was fiery, her bow a leaping, singing flame, fire racing in liquid bubbles beside her. Wind and sea sang a steady song, their chorus rising to the squall's quick tunes. Stars shone here and there in a sky flecked with great cloud masses. We were in the trades.

When day broke there were no sea-fowl with her. Weary of her free gallop, they had gone back to the Horn.

Day and night passed with changeless weather. We became busy on deck with the ship's fine-weather work once more and toiled on our knees monotonously, scouring her planks with huge flat holy-stones. We learned to paint and to varnish, and began to feel a pride in her appearance, despite the monotony of our work. Men spoke of port as though port were a possible thing. One-Eye added his wages, counting the tally of his dollars on his fingertips.

The sea-wonder sank into me, sea and sky blue beyond word's telling. By night we slept beneath the stars again, night after night, the song of the trades above, the hiss of the murmurous ocean about us. We walked the deck with her glory of canvas ashine in the moon-gold. Every rope, every ratline, distinct. Men, sent aloft in the night, were clear-cut, visible as strange and contented creatures at home a hundred feet above the sea.

There was no discordant note in the ship's loveliness. Rope, sail and spar were part of the universal beauty of the night.

The mate walked the poop with dreamy eyes, thinking of wife and child across a world. Macranald, nothing to defy him now, stormed about the decks; Ericson and Furst watching him furtively; his tones deep as his chest; his eye dissatisfied because the challenge of his life was gone. He watched Maider with amused eyes, and, sending him aloft, forgot him; the luckless Maider crawling hither and yon, fear-terrified about the rolling spars.

He became madder and madder. We spoke of port, and he stared vacantly at us. We talked of the shore, and he sat wide-eyed as though we spoke a foreign tongue. He grew careless in his person, omitting to wash himself. There was a night when we took him to the wash deck-tub, stripped him naked and scrubbed his white skin in the light of a full moon. He made no demur, offering no resistance. Thereafter he washed his body often, and knelt on the deck with the rest of us to scour his dungarees. The sea knows no variance from her accustomed rule.

On a blue sea, dotted with nautilus as fields ashore are dotted with daisies, we once more sent down the storm canvas and replaced it with fine-weather sails. That done, painting ship commenced in earnest. Men swung aloft, seated in bosun's chairs, painting the masts down. The rigging was tarred; the teakwork pumiced and varnished.

The ship commenced to shine, her decks spotless. The sun blazed upon her, a dazzling beauty of the sea.

We saw no other sail; no steamer crossed our track. Day after day we were alone. After a week in the doldrums a faint trade filled her sails again and she stole northerly. In warm evenings, in drowsy dawns, in star-lit midnights, life was a thing enchanted, save for our continual hunger.

Day by day the food was the same; morning after morning the bitter coffee in the dirty, rusted skilly-pot, the weevilly hardtack; by noon the beef or pork that now stank under an equatorial sun. The fresh water in the tanks was become tepid, rusty, foul to the taste. The gill of lime-juice served to each of us at noon was a mockery, which often we tossed into the sea. The ship was lovely, the sea incomparable; our work mainly pleasant; sleep and wakefulness alike a warm enjoyment; but we starved. We sat to our meals with curses on our lips.

Maiden grew very thin, nibbling his hardtack with feverish-seeming eyes, swallowing pork with difficult gulplings. Often he asked if we were going to drink our lime-juice, and if not might he drink it? Some of us ceased to go to the galley, leaving him to take our pannikins and swallow our allowance.

Clumsy-fingered, he was spattered with tar and paint. All of us, ere going below from our work, washed the tar and the red lead from our hands with coal-oil, then rinsed with sea-water. Maiden washed less effectually than the rest of us and was almost unrecognizable in his countless paint-spots and patches of tar.

The ship smelled of paint fore and aft. By night the smell of her paint was commingled with the scents of her canvas. Each evening at sundown we slapped sea-water over her dry, hot decks to cool the planks off and to swell the seams.

Running, half-naked, we threw buckets of water over one another. The Old Man appearing on the poop, we became sedate and ceased our skylarking, to laugh when he was gone and trip one another again.

Dauids invented and sang odd little snatches of song and talked constantly of the Vancouver girls; poking quiet fun at Hickson, who, short-tempered, made ineffectual replies and failed in his sarcasms.

Day by day the ship crept northward. It was a full five months since we left Barry, and old One-Eye gloated; his hands rubbed one against the other like two old pieces of sandpapered hardwood. His eye gleamed, his mustache bristling above his brown-toothed mouth. He hoped for a long stay in port, for an equally long passage home—"Dollars is dollars, more days, more dollars," said he. Macranald

stared at him, streaming strings of blasphemy at our little "Jonah," who looked up at the big second mate from eyes as blandly childish as those of a boy.



THE mate entered the half-deck one evening, and Hickson asked him where we were; for since it was the custom of the lime-juice ships to keep all hands in complete ignorance of their latitude and longitude none of us had more than a very vague idea of our whereabouts. We gathered round while the mate placed a finger on the opened atlas on our table.

Thereafter we began to feel as though the sea would not for all time encompass us, and dreamed of port—of fresh food, of walks ashore, of streets in a foreign city where we would see strange things. Adventure, Romance, the best that life had to offer, lay just beyond an opening door.

Hans Ericson and Furst were inseparable. The long passage, before which they had been but chance acquaintances, had made them as David and Jonathan. Their comradeship was a beautiful thing; two young men loving each other—lads from a seaport slum; youthful foreigners of none might say what deep ambitions, what throbbing hopes; skilled young seamen to whose interested fingers Macranald entrusted many a deft job of seamanship. In the dog watch Ericson played his concertina while the sailors danced barefooted on the smooth, white deck. Laughter rang under the star, while the iridescent waves whispered beyond her gleamy railing.

The wind strengthened as she stole northerly.

Sandy Alec was prevailed upon one evening to sing us a Scotch song. One-Eye, squatting crosslegged on the deck, his back against the hatch coaming, delighted us with a growled sea-chorus—

"There's fire in the fo'c'sle."

We clapped and applauded him; but he fell silent to count off the tally of his hard-garnered dollars with a contented face. Then Furst sang a song in his own musical tongue while Hans Ericson threw his soul into the accompaniment. We encored them again and again. They flushed, smiling happily, their eyes matching the high stars above us.

The voyage was well-nigh done. We lost the trades and met with a light head

wind. We painted and scoured her till all her work was done and she was ready to enter port, to come to her moorings. There was no speck of rust to be found upon her whole length. Her paint-work shone by day and by night. The moon waned and nights grew dark, with clouds adrift, and still we sang on the hatch of an evening.

One evening big Macranald joined us there, staying, as he passed forward, to crack a Geordie joke with our old Jonah, who jested back at him dryly and brought a loud laugh from all of us, at which Macranald blushed; though laughing with the rest of us.

The mate came by and, seeing Macranald, stopped also. We were all silent there a while, while the stars gleamed down on us—sailors coming to haven after long voyaging. Maider sat alone on the rail, his face to the sea. Save for the light sigh of the breeze, for the music of the water beside and beneath us, there was silence. Ericson's fingers were stilled upon his concertina, Furst seated at his side. Suddenly the bells broke silence, pealing across a darkened sea, and a sailor's voice rang out from his post on her lookout—

"A-l-l-l's well, sir," and the mate replied, "All right."

The mates walked aft together, men and boys following them to muster under the bridge for the relieving of the wheel and the lookout and the changing of the watches.

"Relieve the wheel and lookout—go below the watch," said the mate, and there was the scarce-heard patter of bare feet as we walked forward again.

It was my watch below, a dark night at sea. Soon I and my comrades slept, unconscious of rising wind, and of beclouding skies above us; unconscious of all, of life, of death of beauty, and of pain, while the ship drove on, northerly toward our longed-for haven.

I was awakened suddenly by a shout in the half-deck, and in total blackness leaped from my bunk; aware of my companions crowding with me to the door. In a moment we were upon the invisible deck. There were no stars. Water crashed about us, while a wind blew shrill. Men cried aloud upon the ropes, and the mates gave orders—short, insistent orders. Overhead sails rumbled against spars and masts in an illimitable darkness. The ship lay upon an even keel, her main yards brought aback.

"Clear away the port quarter boat!"

Tackles rattled aft; the Old Man's voice just audible, asking a question of the mate on the quarterdeck. Chips, the carpenter, hung a lantern in the mizzen rigging by the forward davit of the boat, making it fast to the royal stay. Its gleams lit the boat as she dropped to the waiting sea. Men leaped in, the mate first. One-Eye, his old eye stern, no longer thinking of dollars, seized the stroke oar and threw himself back, his motion savage, his demeanor recklessly fearless; naught mattering now save the thing that lay in hand to do.

The boat gone, we moved to clear the ropes up, to prepare for her return; but first congregated together, a company of deep-water men, to ask a question one of another, while overhead and through her lost rigging the echoes of the wakening cry yet seemed to quaver—

"Man overboard!"

The night pitch dark, faces shone ghostly in the lantern's glow and eyes gleamed with an intense light; in all men's faces an unexpressed appeal and hope, with fear.

"Who is it?"

For a moment the question was unanswered: then some one said, "Davids—he fell from the fore royal yard," and I went cold, knowing that Davids was swimming in the vastness of the sea astern, alone, far from his ship; for men said that the fall had not killed him, that he had called for help when striking the water.

A voice spoke at my side, jesting quaintly, though filled also with an earnestness, as though in life's direst moments laughter must not be quite forgotten.

My heart leaped at the sound of his voice, and I was about to cry out that it was all a mistake, that Davids was at my side and all was well, when once more in solemn accents now, David's clear voice was heard:

"He was with me on the fore royal yard. I came down because the yards were all aback—I didn't know that he was fallen."

Hans Ericson, open-mouthed, terror-eyed, stepped near to me from shadows beyond the lantern's wavering range and glared at Davids; then moved to the rail to peer into the enveloping darkness, seeking the boat amidst the valleys of the sea.

We stood in small groups and sat in little companies along her railing. Macranald passed amongst us, silent for this one time,

the lantern light on his bright-yellow hair, his powerful hands and arms. He stared at the sea, defiance and disdain in his wide eyes. Above us the Old Man stood, waiting. We were a hundred and fifty-five days out from Barry, on the overdue list perhaps, and it was time that we were coming to our port. So the Old Man waited; sensing the impatience of the owner in his office across the world.

We waited an hour; then an hour; then an hour again. The bells went unstruck, as though all men feared lest they toll a knell for young Furst, who swam at midnight by himself far from his ship and comrades.

A sailor, sensing an approach from over the water, moved toward the rail below the empty davits, to stare down to the sea. We gathered there with him. A dim object appeared, to vanish again, and again to appear on a ridge above the hollows.

The boat was coming back. She came in utter silence, only the *cluck—cluck-a, cluck—cluck-a* of her oars audible. The lantern rays were cold on her, cold on the mate erect in her stern; on old One-Eye's bent back swinging, and on Alec behind him. She came under her davits, and we tried to count them.

The Old Man leaned over the poop rail, asking a short, low question of the mate, who replied with a monosyllable.

We hoisted the boat to her chocks, water dripping from her sides and keel to the deck beneath us; then gathered under the bridge-head.

Above us, faint, loomed the scarce visible figure of the Old Man, who after a time of silence bent toward us.

"Is there anything else you want me to do, men?"

Silence was utter then. The mate and big Macranald stood with us—a ship's company hesitating to consider the ways of their mistress the sea.

One-Eye, looking up, spoke.

"Nothin' more to do, sir."

Again a spell of silence; then, relieving tension, the sharp order of the mate, in steady tones, in accents as though we were but upon an ordinary sea—

"Starboard main brace."

It was good to move, to take a rope, to pull hard upon it.

Davids, whom we had thought to be the doomed, cried out upon the rope that we

might haul together to his song. The wind shouted, while the sea replied with equal taunt.

The ship drove on—to port.

Day broke windily above green water-wastes, the sky heavy. At the wheel stood young Hans Ericson, his face drawn, his steady eyes upon his compass card; somewhere astern of him a swimmer, who slept in the sea. Faithful to the ship, Hans stared at the compass, holding her true to her course, taking no glance astern; though he must have yearned to do so.

Macranald went to his side, to stand there a while, gazing at the compass card where the needle quivered unwavering. He turned to stare astern.

"Could your chum swim, lad?" and Hans could make no answer.

At eight bells Hans came forward, his face set, his lips tight, to enter a forecabin where men made room for him, passing him the "bread barge" with friendly hands; silent from all jesting.

"Furst voss fine shvimmer," said Hans Ericson in a solemn voice; then, rising, left the forecabin, to sit alone upon the anchor on her forecabin head and mourn for his lost chum.

Such are the friendships of the sea.



WINDY weather held us, and we drew toward the shore at last till, on a pale dawn of August, we saw what seemed ridges of tumbled cloud far to the nor'ard. The sea, no longer deep-water blue, ran greenly as the inshore waters do. A scent in the air made us crane our heads, drawing its sweetness deeply.

At eight bells of the morning land was clear in view, and the sea ran easily, as though it had never known a moment's hate.

A thrill was in us all.

One-Eye, glad for her long passage, had the tally of his outward-bound dollars counted and told us his pay-day to be; hoping for an equal one upon the homeward way. Big Alec smiled, pleased like the rest of us at sight of land again. Thornton and Billings talked of the waterfront, speaking glibly of the 'longshore dives and the liquor that awaited them; making coarse jests for the younger men.

Towman tottered to the railing to gaze at the shore's great beauty. In from his

last voyage he shivered apprehensively in the bright August sun.

Old Hansen sewed, unconscious of us all; unconscious of anything other than the daily round of the sea.

Hans Ericson kept near to us, the apprentices, as though our youth reminded him of his dead chum.

The one-time boatswain talked volubly, endeavoring to make amends by an over-friendliness for his cowardice off the Horn. That was a back page with all, save with himself. There would be time in days to come for him to prove his friendship by standing to the braces when need came for common courage. Thinking our nonchalance to be forgetfulness, supposing that perhaps after all we had not known, he became overfriendly until Hickson threw a sneer to him that, wilting him, sent him to the forecabin, to mutter braggart curses to himself.

"There'll be mail soon, sir," said Davids to the mate, who, gazing at him from the same half-weary, expressionless face, made no answer.

Macranald, come in to shore, drove us harder than at sea. With no ship or sea to fight he must needs be overbearing with the ship's company. Knowing him well, having seen him in the thick of the gales, we paid small heed to him; for we liked him well.

Maider stared at the land and, talking much about little, suddenly remembering the Horn shuddered. We were done with the Horn until another time. It meant nothing to us now—being but a hazy memory.

The Old Man strode his poop, scrutinizing his ship lest at the last minute be found on her a spot that failed to dazzle. His ship was perfect, a victor of the sea in from her battles.

Thus, a hundred and sixty-six days out from Barry Roads, we came at last to Flattery and took our tug-boat to enter Juan de Fuca Strait. We furled her sails for the last time and sang as we rolled them. We sent them down in huge white festoons, sail and sail together, till the deck was deep in canvas.

Bearing them on our shoulders to the sail-locker, we laughed at Davids, who repeated his home-made rimes for our amusement; rimes that he had often repeated on windy half-deck nights at sea

when we felt all forlorn, hungry and petulant with our many troubles.

"Man that is born of woman has but a short time to live:

He goes up like a main topmast staysail and comes down like a flying jib."

Only Hans Ericson bore his weight of sail unsmiling at the little care-free Welsh apprentice boy. Maider grinned; mad grins, scarce knowing what he grinned at.

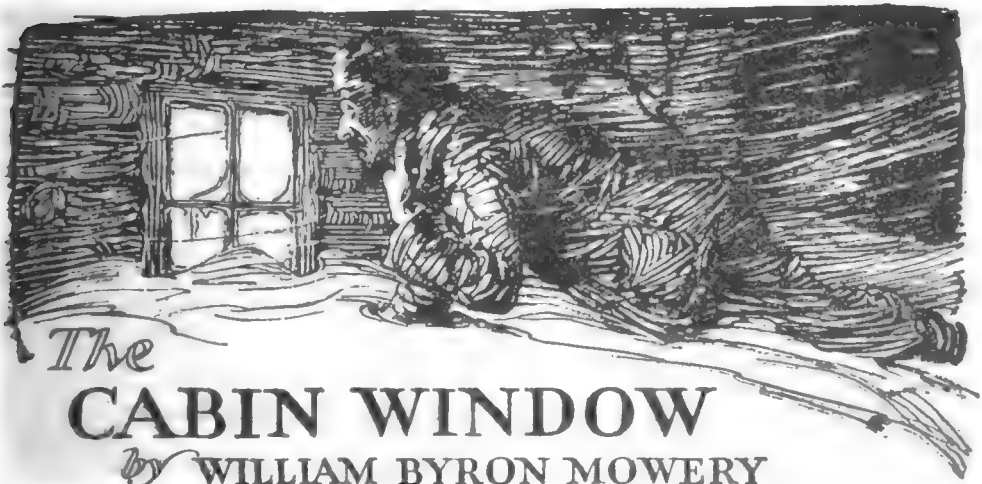
Lights twinkled on the shore when we dropped anchor, lights starry in the sky above us; a great peace in our hearts, the

sweet scent of tree and flower and green grass in the evening air.

So ship and sailor, so Jonah and Big Alec, Macranald and the boys, Dutchman and Finn, the crazed sea apprentice and the coal-eyed Old Man, the quiet mate beside him, came in once more to port—to the "long night in"—a night of sleep with no disturbance from the elements, with no bells to harken to or salty ropes to haul upon or sails to furl.

We, her apprentices, were not captains yet—but hoped some day to be!

"Leave her, Johnny, leave her how you can, Oh, leave her, Johnny—leave her——"



CABIN WINDOW

by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Author of "How It Worked," "The Third in a Quarrel," etc.

BENT AVERY was speaking. In the low-ceilinged, big square room that was general kitchen, post-office and evening gathering-place for the liveryes of Fort Chimo, were eleven weather-bronzed fishermen and trappers. They sat on the bench wainscoting the wall, complacently puffing the room full of smoke and helping themselves to the "fathom an' a 'arf," which the assistant factor had brought from the ware-room. With respectful attention they listened to what he was saying. It was not often that Avery left his books for an evening and came to smoke with the men.

He sat near the door, where he could look squarely into the face of each liverye. He spoke softly—just above the steady, muffled

roar of the snow northeaster outside, tearing down from the Baffin ice-barrens.

In spite of the dubiousness of his plan, in spite of the lies he was deliberately telling. Avery spoke casually, as if his words were as innocent as the desultory small-talk of the evening. But he wetted his lips whenever he mentioned the name of Gaspard Tremaine, and by sheer will kept his emotions from welling into his voice and betraying his purpose.

As he talked his gray eyes rested on each face in turn, searching for a sign. There was "Jay-Bird" Willett, who drove the mail team across to the Labrador in Winter. Jay-Bird was only a big boy, with thoughts no more serious than a rare visit and fling at St. Johns, or the record his team hung

up at the Rigolette races. There was young McKennie, store clerk, fun-loving, sunny-hearted. There was Ridoubet, manager of the Revillion Freres House, a polished courtier in strange setting, always ready with a quip about the rival "Here Before—" Company.

There was Rogers Bryce, ministerial even in seal-skins; who read services on Sunday mornings in the store-room, officiated at funerals and the rare marriages, and stood in lieu of an appointed shepherd on the neglected Koksoak.

There was Ole Stefansson, lumbering bear of a man, with the mind and heart of a child. There was Ellis Lanark, dark-eyed, with black spade beard and handsome face of a don, and the imperative manner of one used to knocking obstacles—men or circumstances—from his path.

He was a comparative newcomer, a James Bay man of some money.

Since the day of his coming a year before, he had been desperately in love with Mildred Tremaine; had followed the Tremaines, in fact, from the St. James country. But Gaspard had been one too many for him. Not even his superior affluence of frame house, trim schooner, and prospering cobalt mine on Resolution Island could break through the guard which Tremaine kept over his daughter.

There was not one of the other younger livyeres in the room who had not sought her. There was an element of personal glory in the winning of the girl. Lanark, confident of his superiority in her eyes over the run of the livyeres and openly boastful of his power to win her away from her father, had been marched away from the cabin with a gun when he became too forward. Even Thad Masterson, who looked after the old man and helped him get along, had had the dogs put on him after a hot quarrel. Masterson was the only livyere not there that evening; the recent incident enlivened the bench talk. Thad had a temper of his own; and there were shrewd opinions laid that he would not be kept away from Tremaine's cabin. Some of the livyeres swore that Mildred Tremaine was a flirt, with coquetry in her French blood. Few of them *knew* that duty to her father was the sole cause of her staying single.

Bent Avery paused in his slow speech. He had skilfully prepared for a last sen-

tence. As he was moistening his lips to speak, Ridoubet interposed—

"You say, Willett, that you and *pere* Tremaine are planning to go out to the coast when the white-coats come in?"

Willett nodded. It was customary for the unmarried livyeres to take old Tremaine along on trips and share the catch with him, because of his age and poverty.

"Wonder what dad will do with Milly?" McKennie broke in. Being "smitted" with Ridoubet's only daughter, young McKennie could talk flippantly of Mildred. "He knows better'n to let her here by herself. An' if he takes her along he can't swatch white-coats for watchin' Jay-Bird."

"I ben tank he maybe fraze her up in ice, like he do to keep berries," Stefansson said, slapping his knee and laughing uproariously over his simple joke.

"Gaspard Tremaine isn't going on that trip, Willett," Avery spoke up. "He told me this evening that he felt unable to go this Spring."

A quick, involuntary gesture from Lanark.

"This evening?" he queried quickly.

Bent Avery looked across the room at Lanark. The other livyeres had paid only ordinary attention to Avery's last words. But Lanark leaned forward on the bench as if to rise. Meeting Avery's steady gaze, he settled back against the wall.

"Yes, this evening," the assistant factor answered casually, looking at Lanark but speaking to everybody. "I walked out to see if they needed anything from the store. He was cutting wood in the drogue and having a hard time sledding with his three pups."

"Today?" Lanark stammered to Avery. "Today?"

"Yes," Avery repeated, evenly. "I stayed for supper there."

Lanark smothered an exclamation that went unnoticed by every one but the assistant factor. He half rose to his feet, glanced around the circle of faces, and sank back. Something within him was struggling for utterance; he wetted his lips to speak but it went unsaid.

"That surprizes me, Bent Avery," said Willett. "Yesterday mornin' he was hard set on goin'."

The other men did not interrupt their smoking. Avery paid no attention to them, nor to Willett's remark. After a minute of silence, he went on talking, his eyes on

Lanark alone. He spoke of the hour he had spent in the cabin, of the pathetic realization of the old man that he had taken his last sealing trip, of the caribou callops Mildred had cooked. He even forced himself to jest lightly about the old man's watchful eye across the supper board.

As often as he mentioned the word *today* or *this evening*, Lanark started and his pallor deepened. He never took his eyes from Avery's face. Though he said nothing after his first impulsive question, he became more and more agitated as the assistant factor talked on, till he could hold himself in leash no longer. He was livid; his features worked. He suddenly sprang up and rushed out of the door.

As the door banged behind him, a blast swirled snow into the room and licked the flame off the caribou-tallow candle. There was a scramble for matches.



IN THE darkness Avery crossed the room and laid his hand on Ole Stefansson's shoulder.

"Come along with me, Ole," he said in a low, quick voice. "Get into your top-coat and hurry. No questions now. Quick!"

"What ben—" Stefansson hawed, his slow wits gathering like clouds.

Avery pulled him to his feet, thrust his jacket into his hands, and armed him toward the door. They stepped outside as Bryce relighted the big candle.

"What ben de reason in dis?" Stefansson boomed, above the roar of the wind.

"We are going up to Gaspard Tremaine's cabin," Avery answered, cupping his hands to be heard. "I need your help tonight. We can't stop and explain. Come!"

"I get de racquets den," Stefansson said, submitting without further question.

"No. We'll follow the river on the bare ice, and along the cliff into Tremaine's cove. You don't need them."

At mention of the cliff Stefansson hung back.

"Pass dat ha'tned rock? No, sir. I ben see lights dere ant hear womens scream. Lanark he yust telling us about headless man wid rifle walking up de face of de rock. Not dis night!"

"You — baby!" Avery blazed. "Lanark had a reason for telling you lies about a headless man with a rifle. I came past that cliff by myself not an hour ago. We've got

to take the river. The komatik trail would make us late. I tell you to come."

The fear of Bent Avery's anger was more compelling than the fear of haunted cliffs. Stefansson went.

Leaning against the wind, the two men pushed their way through the drifts to the wind-swept shore, past the fish stages and flakes, and out upon the ice.

The black pall of scudding clouds shut out all light from the stars and play of the Borealis. The night was dark as the maw of a bear; and the wind, laden with stinging, icy snow struck like a club. They had to turn about every few paces and walk into it backward. It tried to tear their feet from under them. In pitchy blackness they groped their way over the ice.

It was a full mile to the cliff. After what seemed hours of blind butting against the gale, they came to a place where the wind



roared over their heads. Avery knew they were near the foot of the high rock wall which ran up the cove almost to Tremaine's cabin.

He peered ahead into the darkness till his eyes ached, without being able to see the cliff. He turned to his left, trusting to luck to keep from running into the rock or into the air-holes kept open in the river-ice by harbor seals.

Big Stefansson clung to him so closely that Avery smiled in spite of the grim work ahead. The wind shrieked through the faults of the great cliff. Had there been moon- or star-light reflected from the huge

icicles hanging to the ledges, Stefansson would have bolted. Bent Avery kept a tight clutch on his arm.

They came at last to the end of the cliff where the gale could hit them again. Groping their way deeply into the cove, they left the ice and crept inland three hundred yards where, in the shelter of a swell and a thick clump of gnarled balsam, the Tremaine cabin stood.

"I think we are here in time," Avery said, as they topped the swell and saw a yellow finger of light from the tiny window. "But don't make any noise, Ole. Do exactly as I tell you."

The big livyere grunted. He was still shaky from the scare of the cliff, and clung to Avery like a husky when wolves are about.

They crept toward the cabin, not to the door on the sheltered side, but to the tiny slit of a window on the north. It looked like the yellow eye of a beast. Snow was piled and drifted high against the log house to the level of the window.

"Keep away from that shaft of light," Avery cautioned, as they lay under the split-log eaves. "I'm going to look in and then get on the other side of the window. Keep back about ten feet from the light and don't move till I give you the word."

Stefansson gripped his arm in token that he understood what was expected of him.

Avery lay flat on the snow and looked down into the cabin.



A FIREPLACE of crackling spruce lighted the small room. A heavy block for table, a few chairs, hand-made, a bunk built against the side of the cabin, and a sheet-iron cooking-jerry was all the furniture of the place. One corner was built off into a tiny bedroom. Avery could see the white coverlet of the small bed inside the nook. For all its bareness, the cabin had the homey air of a woman's keeping.

Mildred Tremaine sat near the fireplace, working on a white fox capote. Her head was turned partly toward the window, so that Avery could see the girlish silhouette of her face and throat. In the fire-light her brown hair shimmered and her cheeks glowed unnaturally bright. Her features showed the unbending will and decision of her father—a trait at which Avery had

marveled more than once as he watched Thad Masterson's courtship of her.

Directly in front of the fireplace was the figure of Gaspard Tremaine. He was hunched up in his arm-chair, his hands folded on his lap and his feet propped upon another stool. His back was to the window, so that his face could not be seen. Pipe and twist were on the floor beside him. He seemed nodding. The dancing flames gave the illusion that now and then he moved in his chair.

A huge overcoat made from the skin of a black bear hung on a wall-peg close to Gaspard. It, too, seemed to move slightly from time to time. A pair of heavy boots protruded from beneath it, as if the coat were occupied.

Occasionally Mildred stopped her work and spoke. Avery could hear her, though he could not make out the words. A man's low voice answered her, but Gaspard did not move. With a second quick glance about the room, Avery crept back from the light and hid against the cabin.

Half an hour slipped by, and nothing came out of the night. Avery began to worry. If his plan failed, not only would it be a blow against his sway over the livyeres and their awe of him, but the direful consequences to Thad Masterson would be swift. Avery knew the fiery quick conclusions of the men he had left in the store-room; he remembered their words about Masterson's quarrel and their prophecies.

Just as he was thinking of slipping around to Stefansson to encourage him, his eye caught a dark object moving at the edge of the balsam clump. At first sight he thought it was a tree-top swaying above the snow. Then he saw it was a man. As the figure crept up the lane of light within fifteen feet of him, Avery recognized Ellis Lanark.

In his terror-stricken flight from the store-room, he had not thought of his racquets. Floundering in the wind-piled drifts along the komatik trail had made him long in coming.

On hands and knees Lanark crept up to the window. He seemed irresistibly drawn toward it, against his will. As he raised his head and looked down into the cabin, the light fell full upon his face. His eyes glittered insanely; his mouth sagged. All his habitual air of superiority and *sang-froid* was gone. He crouched there, breathing hard, shaking with frenzy, his eyes glued to

the pane. He gulped spasmodically and caught at his throat.

For one minute he looked, unable to break away. Then from his lips burst a hoarse cry. As if released from a spell and galvanized into action, he leaped to his feet to flee.

From his hiding-place Bent Avery sprang at him. They went down on the snow in a heap. In his terror Lanark had the strength of three men. He would have torn out of Avery's grasp and got away had not Ole Stefansson sprung in to help without waiting for the word. Even the two of them scarcely held him. He thrashed about in the smothering snow until all three rolled down the drift into a hollow.

Lanark did not strike at his assailants. He seemed to think he was in the clutch of some Power. Reason had deserted him. He struggled only to break loose and get away from the cabin. But Stefansson grappled him about the waist and held him with the hug of a bear.

"He come back to tell!" Lanark shrieked, suddenly ceasing his struggle and going limp. "There's a hole through his head. I killed him, but in there he sets talking to her. He's telling her about me, before he goes for good—telling her lies about me at Hannah Bay House like he threatened to. I killed him yesterday, and, —! There he sets talking to her. He's been back all day with that hole through his head!"

Avery slipped a loop over Lanark's hands.

"Get up!" he ordered.

For the first time Lanark realized that men were holding him. He struck at Bent Avery with both fists. Stefansson held him while the assistant factor bound both arms to his sides. He kicked and plunged

till Stefansson had to pick him up bodily.

"We're going into the cabin," Avery directed. "Come!"



IT WAS Thad Masterson who opened the door. He stared at Bent Avery and at Stefansson's struggling prisoner.

"Lanark!" he burst out.

"It's a lie!" Lanark foamed. "I saw a headless man with a rifle walking——"

Avery stopped him.

"He *had* to come and look with his own eyes. He heard you and Mildred talking, and thought it was——"

Avery pointed to a rigid figure propped life-like in the chair.

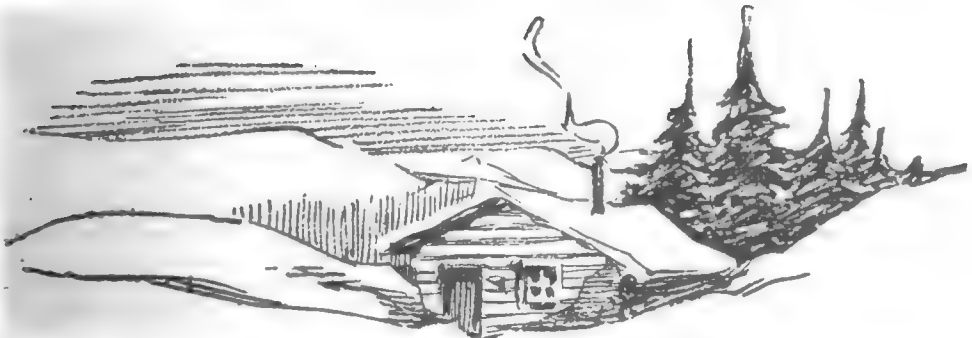
Lanark gave one look at the figure of Gaspard Tremaine. He saw the uncanny trap of Bent Avery, and his own fatal mistake. His nerves snapped. Stefansson let him slide to the floor.

"You stay with her, Masterson," Avery said crisply, motioning to the corner nook. "It's your place now to comfort her. Ole and I will take Lanark back where he just came from. I'll send a komatik after Mildred. She can stay with Mrs. Bryce until you——"

Masterson nodded, chokingly.

"What's dis about?" Stefansson bellowed hoarsely, aghast when it broke upon him that the old livyere in the armchair was stone dead. "You say, Bent Avery?"

"Gaspard didn't come home last night," Avery said tersely. "Mildred went to Masterson's cabin. Masterson found him murdered at the foot of the cliff. He came and told me. I knew they'd suspect Masterson if the murderer were not found. We said nothing and I arranged—what you have seen tonight."





PORTO BELLO GOLD *by*

A Five-Part Story **Part III** ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "Swain's End," "Swain, Jarl-Maker," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

I WAS in the counting-room talking with Peter Corlaer, the chief of our fur-traders, when the bond-boy, Darby McGraw, ran in.

"The Bristol packet is in, Master Robert," he cried. "And, oh, sir, the watermen do say there be a pirate ship off Sandy Hook!"

I went with the news to my father, whom I found in the company of Master Clinton, the Governor of the Colony of New York. They were great friends, despite the fact my father once had been a Jacobite. We reached them just as Captain Farraday, the master of the Bristol packet, was telling his story.

"Chased?" he cried to my father. "That I was, Master Ormerod, by the pirate frigate *Royal James*."

"That would be the vessel of the fellow known as Captain Rip-Rap," observed my father; and there was a quality in his voice and manner which led me to think that he labored in the grip of some strong emotion.

"True for you, Master Ormerod," answered Captain Farraday. "A complete rogue, but a man of exquisite dress and manners. And moreover as arrant a Jacobite as ever was. He works with John Flint, who is no less of a rascal, albeit rougher. Flint sails in the *Walrus*. Between them they ha' the metal to hammer a brace of King's ships."

Captain Farraday stopped for breath, and Governor Clinton seized the opportunity to ask with a smile:

"Captain Rip-Rap did you call your pursuer? What manner of name is this?"

"He is singularly partial to that mixture of snuff," answered Captain Farraday. "I am told his own men give him that name, for even they do not know that to which he was born. 'Tis said he was a gentleman who suffered for his political convictions."

Later, when we were alone in the counting-room—Peter, my father and I—they told me the secret

they shared with Captain Rip-Rap. He was Andrew Murray, my mother's uncle.

"But," I cried, "he was the great trader who conducted the contraband trade with Canada. 'Twas he whom you and Corlaer and the Iroquois fought when you broke down the barriers of the Doom Trail and won back the fur-trade for our people. Why, 'twas then you—and—"

I knew the deep feeling my father still had for my long-dead mother, and I scrupled to stir his memories.

Next morning I took Darby with me to make a business call on Captain Farraday. As we walked along the water-front we saw a Spanish frigate and a battered little brig at anchor, the latter with a cannon-shot hole in her side. A one-legged sailor who said that he was off the latter vessel introduced himself as Long John Silver and told us a thrilling story of how the ship had been pursued by Rip-Rap. He was so ingratiating that I lent him Darby to guide him to his destination, the Whale's Head Tavern.

By the time I had finished my business on board the Bristol packet the afternoon was gone. I was on my way back to the counting-house when I was stopped by a group from the Spanish ship.

"Sir," said a young lady whom they were escorting, "can you direct me to the Whale's Head Tavern?"

She appeared to be the last sort of woman who might be expected to have anything to do with this noted resort of bad characters. Matters grew clearer when she explained that she sought her father, Colonel O'Donnell, a Jacobite exile in the service of Spain. I not only guided her to the tavern, but went inside to tell the colonel that his daughter awaited him. There I found Darby, with Long John and a couple of his cronies, known as Bill Bones and Black Dog. The boy obviously was captivated by Long John's tales of the sea. Silver volunteered to find O'Donnell for me. He professed not to know the Irishman, but had no difficulty in locating him.

As already set forth, "Porto Bello Gold," is the story of how the treasure came to be on Treasure Island. The writing of the story was undertaken with the approval of Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's literary executor.

That evening after dinner we had a call from Captain Rip-Rap. He spoke of "launching the coup of his career," one which "will echo in throne-rooms and chancelleries," and announced that I was his heir and that as such he wanted me to be his assistant. I refused to go. Immediately a gang of his men entered with Long John at their head. Darby McGraw, his head turned by Silver's alluring tales, had joined the pirates and as his first lawless act had let them into the house. As they trussed me up, Peter insisted on going too, and they obliged him—"your muscles should prove useful," observed my great-uncle, noting his tremendous strength.

The pirates rowed out to the brig and took us aboard. My great-uncle had a short conversation with O'Donnell regarding a Spanish ship, the *Santissima Trinidad*, the full purport of which I did not understand. I did gather, though, that there was a Jacobite plot afoot, as a detail to which Murray and his daughter were to be taken off the Spaniard and become the guests of Murray on his pirate vessel. But how? Why? When? Where?

Well, O'Donnell went back at last to his Spanish frigate, and we put to sea. Once the pirates had us where we couldn't escape, our bonds were removed and Silver became his hypocritically unctuous and expansive self. Among other things I learned from him that the brig had been especially captured for this visit to New York; that its original crew of honest men had been murdered, and that as soon as we came up with the *Royal James* and the *Walrus*, this vessel was to be sunk and the prime ruffians who now temporarily manned it were to be retransferred to their original stations on the two pirate craft. Silver told me all this while acting as lookout for the helmsman, a horrible blind villain named Pew who steered by the feel of the wind in the sails.

As we three talked on, the sailing-master, Bill Bones, came along and picked a fight with Peter Corlier. Seasick though he was, the huge Dutchman still had strength enough to take Bones' knife away from him and haul him over the balyard, where Peter proceeded to reeve a landsman's slip-noose. Bones was saved from being hanged by my great-uncle, who told him that another infraction of discipline would result in his being keel-hauled.

NEXT day we met the *Walrus* and the *Royal James*, blew up the pirated brig and transferred the crew to their respective ships, all according to plan. Peter and I were taken aboard my great-uncle's ship, while Silver, Darby McGraw

Bones, Pew and Black Dog were among those returned to Flint's command.

My great-uncle was now prepared to talk over his "coup" with Flint.

"During our Spanish cruises," he said, "I established connections with a group of Jacobite gentlemen who can tell me when and from what port this year's royal treasure-ship will sail for Spain. I have just finished arrangements with my principal confederate, whom I met in New York. It simply remains for us to execute the plan."

The treasure amounted to one million five hundred thousand pounds. Murray announced that it was to be divided thus: One hundred thousand pounds to himself as author of the scheme; seven hundred thousand to the two ships, and seven hundred thousand to the confederates. Flint was to stay hidden in the harbor of the pirates' rendezvous at Spyglass Island—known also as Treasure Island—while the *Royal James*, masquerading as a King's frigate, was to cruise for the treasure-ship. Peter and I were to remain in Flint's hands as hostages against Murray's return. Flint cursed at the terms, but he had to take either them or nothing.

After Flint had departed my uncle confided further details to me. The treasure-ship was the *Santissima Trinidad*; the Jacobite confederates were represented by Colonel O'Donnell, and the money was to be used to restore Bonnie Prince Charlie to the throne of England. As inspector of fortifications of the Spanish ports on the Main O'Donnell had learned that the *Trinidad* was to sail from Porto Bello; and now he undertook to learn the closely guarded secret of her exact sailing-date, to take passage on her with his daughter, using the King's business as a pretext thereto, and to send all necessary information on to us in advance by another confederate. When we had captured the *Trinidad* we were to take him and his daughter on board and make off for Treasure Island to divide the plunder and concert arrangements for delivering their share to O'Donnell's friends. The *Trinidad* was to be scuttled with all on board. I vetoed this last barbarity, and instead we agreed that Murray in his rôle of the pirate Captain Rip-Rap was to make a pretense of bearing off the girl as booty and of imprisoning the father to silence his objections.

We changed our course to bring us to Treasure Island, where we careened and refitted the *Royal James*. Flint's crew refused to do such menial work upon the *Walrus*, so my great-uncle kept them out of mischief by having them build a fort. When all was in readiness Murray turned Peter and me over to Flint and prepared to sail on the morning tide.

CHAPTER XI

PETER PLAYS AT BOWLS WITH DESTINY

DARBY MCGRAW'S redhead shone in the lanthorn-light.

"Whisht, but it's Masther Bob again! Now ain't this the mighty fortune to have ye with us! Ha' ye left the old — yon for good?"

He nodded his torch of hair at the vague hull of the *James*. Flint exploded with raucous laughter.

"The old — yon," he repeated. "— me, but it takes Darby to put the right word to a man. 'Tis what he is, blast him for the — — — he sets himself up to be!"

Darby proffered him a huge silver beaker of rum.

"I fetched this from the cabin after ye, captain," said the Irish boy in his wheedling brogue. "Troth, says I to meself, if the captain must talk with Murray he'll ha' a bad taste in the mouth o' him to be washed

out, and I'd best ha' a sup o' sugar-juice handy for his needin's."

Flint seized the rum, threw back his head and drained the fiery stuff as if it had been wine.

"You said right, my lad," he answered sourly. "And I'm thinking I'll maybe need all the luck that red head o' yours can bring me. Where's Billy Bones?"

"Dhrunk under the cabin table," returned Darby promptly.

"Gut him for the souse he is! And Long John?"

"Sure, captain dear, 'twas yourself sent him ashore to keep the lads up to the fort from carvin' theirselves."

"So I did. Well, I'll see to the prisoners myself then."

"Pris'ners!" protested Darby, wide-eyed. "Troth, himself is the nevvvy or what-not o' the old —. For why'll ye be makin' him a pris'ner? More by token, he was me friend in New York, and Peter too. Grand pirates they'll be, if ye do but give 'em time."

"Prisoners I said, and prisoners they are!" glowered Flint. "D'ye know what a hostage is, Darby?"

"One that'll be by-ordinary wicked?" answered Darby.

"More'n likely," assented Flint with a pardonable chuckle. "Well, these is hostages, Darby. Likewise prisoners."

"Och, captain, ye won't be hard on Masther Bob! He's as kindly a young gentleman as ever I see—and Peter there is a grand fightin' feller. Ye should hear to the tales they tell o' his murtherin' and slayin' with the red Injuns."

"I'll be as hard as they make me be," returned Flint. "But for tonight I must have them safe."

Darby plucked at his sleeve.

"I'll say naught if ye must put Peter away—though a good friend I ha' called him. But be aisy wi' Masther Bob and let me take him below for a sup for old times' sake. Troth, there's no harm in nature in him. And if he has a chance at education in the right way 'tis a fine, brave pirate we'll make o' him that can fight two men at once wi' knife and tomahawk."

Flint's eyes narrowed.

"Ho-ho!" he exclaimed. "Is that the kind of cockerel ye are, Master Ormerod or whatever ye may be called? I'm main thankful for the tip-off, Darby. I knew

Buckskin was dangerous, but I'd never ha' been on my guard for the young 'un except for you. Gut me if I take chances wi' two such champions!"

I saw that Darby was doing more harm than good by his sponsoring of me, so I spoke up for myself.

"You need not take what the boy says for truth," I said. "He means well, but——"

"And if I didn't see ye knock the hatchet from Tom Trumbull's hand the while ye were fending Dick Varje's knife—and could easily ha' stabbed him, fightin' earnest, as Peter said—may I be hornswoggled for a lubber!" proclaimed Darby indignantly.

"That's enough for me," snarled Flint. "No lies, if it please you, my fine gentleman! The time may come we'll put your boasts to——"

"I have not boasted."

"Keep your tongue behind your teeth! Hold still, the two o' ye, or I'll give ye a bellyful o' pickling-brine."

He signaled up a dozen or so of the nearest of his men, all of whom had been observing us with a mingling of interest and hostility.

"We'll put these knife-fighters in the lazaret for the night," he announced. "They're a desperate pair, and we'll watch 'em close until they are under hatches."

"Oh, whirra, whirra!" sobbed Darby. "Do but see what I did to ye with my tongue that wags from the middle both ways! Sure, captain darlin', ye don't need to hold against Masther Bob what I said. All he seeks is to be a grand, murtherin' pirate. Troth, we talked o' nothin' else in the old days."

"Don't be foolish, Darby," I said.

And to Flint, as the group closed around us—

"Captain Murray bade you——"

"I know, I know!" he interrupted impatiently. "The treatment you receive will be whatever you earn for yourselves. I'm an easy skipper, as any man aboard the *Walrus* will tell ye, my lad. But you are my stakes in a rich venture, and I'll be —— if I take any chance on losing ye or your fat friend as goes with you. So stow your gab, and come wi' me willingly, and no blows struck or feelings injured. Tomorrow the *James* will ha' sailed, and then we'll deal a new hand all around."

His narrow green eyes, squinting out on

either side of his thin nose, surveyed me with a kind of appraisal.

"I have an idea we may yet find interests in common," he concluded. "But that's to be seen."

Peter, at my elbow, spoke for the first time.

"*Ja, ja*. We go. I hafe a wish to sleep."

"Sleep, is it?" jeered Flint. "That ye shall, my hearty! Come along o' me."

He led us aft, the others following, Darby in the rear almost in tears. We entered the poop quarters, stumbling over empty bottles, broken platters, discarded garments, boots, articles of equipment and weapons. At the end of a dark passage Flint unhooked a lanthorn from a wall and one of his men heaved up a trapdoor. Below was a pool of shadows that scuttled and swayed as if to escape the feeble light. There was an odor also none too pleasant.

I drew back.

"Certes, you could lodge us securely otherwhere than this," I protested.

"No, no," answered Flint. "There's not a door aboard hath a lock would hold Darby, let alone you two. I'm sorry for ye, lad, if it's no fault o' yours that you're here; but for tonight at least you must lie in the lazaret. Come, come; don't make me use force. Here, ye shall ha' the lanthorn to keep the rats off, and in the morning we'll manage different."

Peter pushed past me, and took the lanthorn from his hand.

"We go, *ja*," he squeaked. "Come, Bob."

I followed him without another word, already wondering at his extraordinary docility.

"Do ye see your way, my masters?" Flint called after us, mimicking the servile tones of a tavernkeeper to the considerable amusement of his body-guard. "Mind the low roof, an' it please ye, sirs. The beds ha' not been aired, but then we had no expectation o' your company."

A guffaw of rough merriment, pierced by Darby's Irish wail, and the trapdoor crashed down. A hasp clacked home in a bolt, and footsteps thudded away. I sat on the bottommost step of the ladder and peered hopelessly around me as Peter, swinging the lanthorn as high as the low deckroom allowed, prowled around the limited area of our prison.

A black rat as large as a cat rushed across

my feet. Squeaks and rustlings sounded in the corners. There was the *lap-lap-lap* of water against the vessel's hull, the creak of the rudder and the strange moaning noises which any ship emits, whether at anchor or under weigh.

Peter returned to the ladder-foot, deposited the lanthorn on the floor and plumped himself beside it.

"What you t'ink, Bob?" he said blandly. "Do we stay or get oudt?"

I frowned at him.

"'Tis no joke," I snapped. "I had reasons for——"

"*Ja*," he agreed. "Der little gal."

The Dutchman said so little and revealed such scant interest in what went on about him that he frequently surprized even those who knew him best, as my father never tired of maintaining. He had not spoken, up to this evening, of Murray's plan to employ me as a hostage to conciliate Flint. He had never suggested that he would accompany me. He had never betrayed by any hint a supposition that I might prefer to remain aboard the *Royal James* during the cruise after the treasure-ship. But on all these points he had done considerable thinking as he now proceeded to demonstrate.

"How did you know!" I exclaimed.

"I know," he replied with his simpering imitation of a laugh. "You t'ink der little gal is a goodt gal. You t'ink it is not goodt dot she be taken aboard der *James*. You want to be there andt be sure dot she is safe."

"'Tis true as gospel, Peter," I groaned. "I hoped to the last this ridiculous plan of Murray's would fall through in some manner, but the man has a —— determination."

"*Ja*," agreed Peter. "I t'ink he takes der treasure-ship, Bob. Dot's easy."

"Easy? I see not how!"

"*Ja*, it is easy to take her. But after comes his troubles. Much treasure is bad for pirates. We hafe troubles after."

"'We!' We won't be there. Very likely we'll be dead, Peter, slain in one of the *Walrus*' knife frays."

"Suppose we get oudt tonight," answered Peter persuasively. "Suppose we get oudt and back to der *James*. *Ja*?"

I looked around me skeptically at the heavy planking and stout timbers of the sides and for'ard bulkhead.

"It can't be done. 'Twould take a week

to break out of this—and the *James* will be sailing in five or six hours.”

“*Neen*,” said Peter. “We get oudt—any time we get oudt.”

“How?” I demanded.

He picked up the lanthorn and led me for’ard to the bulkhead. The light showed that one of the oaken planks was slightly sprung, leaving an infinitesimal crack between its edge and the uppermost of its fellows.

“Are you planning to pry that off with your finger-nails?” I taunted him.

“*Neen*,” he answered, and conducted me to a corner whence the rats scudded as we approached.

He stirred his foot amongst some rubbish and turned up several long, wrought-iron spikes, such as are used to bolt together the heavier ship-timbers.

“Dot’s plenty,” he said.

I could hardly control the gush of relief that welled up in me.

“I believe it is,” I whispered. “But, oh, Peter, there is such little time!”

“Enough,” he grunted. “Come! We begin.”



WE LISTENED at the bulkhead for signs of life on the opposite side, but not a sound came through to us, although the clamor on the upper deck and in the poop cabin seeped into our dungeon from overhead. ’Twas stiflingly hot, and Peter’s first care was to strip off his buckskin shirt and leggings.

“We got to swim,” he said, eying them regretfully. “You don’t need clothes to-night, Bob.”

So I followed his example, and we fell to work with our spikes upon the sprung plank, the sweat pouring in rills of moisture from our half-naked bodies, our crude tools slipping in our greasy fingers as we pried and pushed and fought for every inch of space betwixt the plank and the upright it was nailed to. Peter did all the work. It was his tremendous muscles that fretted and teased the point of his spike into the tiny gap that awaited us, that gradually enlarged the advantage. All I could do was to hold whatever space he won, giving him opportunity to improve upon it until a smashing drive of his great shoulder tore the plank loose at one end.

We waited, then, gasping for breath, wiping the sweat from our eyes, fearful lest

the wrench of the wood as it was ripped free should have attracted the attention of some member of the crew. But nobody appeared, and the uproar on deck was audibly decreased. Even the crew of the *Walrus* found occasion for sleep.

The most difficult portion of our task was immediately ahead. We had to pry loose now a plank which was nailed fast to the uprights, and we dared not resort to the use of any substitute for a hammer because of the noise. ’Twas necessary for Peter’s fingers to force the point of a spike between plank and upright and slowly wedge the two apart. He did it, with the palm of his bare hand for mallet, his muffled grunts the only indication of the energy he expended.

But this was a matter of several hours, for I was less able to assist than I had been before. My puny strength was wholly inadequate to the wrestle with seasoned wood and tempered iron which he must carry on in cramped quarters and semidarkness.

As the last nail yielded to Peter’s shoulder the thin clangor of the bell of the *Royal James* stole down to us out of the night. Four times it rang—two o’clock! No answering strokes sounded on the deck above us. Ship routine was a thing of caprice aboard the *Walrus*.

“Get oudt, Bob,” whispered Peter.

I wriggled through the gap in the bulkhead, and he passed the lanthorn after me. Its flame was burning low, but I had sufficient light to determine that I stood in a stores-hold crammed with casks of rum, salt meat and ship’s biscuit. A door in its for’ard bulkhead led to another hold of the orlop deck, where were a hatch and ladder leading up to the gundeck. I crept as far as the foot of the ladder and listened to the snores of the scores of men who slept in hammocks slung between the great guns of the battery. That way lay our only path of escape.

I returned to Peter in a mood that was none too cheerful; but he was already at work with his spike, hissing like a kettle on the boil as he prodded away with its blunted point. I was able to be of more assistance to him this time, since from the farther side ’twas possible to exert a greater leverage, once the plank was sprung loose. Yet the *James* sounded seven bells before we were successful. Peter grunted his satisfaction.

“We got time,” he said. “Whoof! So

much I sweat I slide me t'rough dot hole."

The lantern's flicker was little more than a pin-prick of flame in the darkness of the ship's bowels, but I lighted my shirt from it and held this aloft to help him see his way. He was stripped to the buff, and his pink, hairless body was all a-glisten as he rolled into the opening. His head and shoulders made it easily, but I saw with dismay that his immense paunch was an unsurmountable obstacle. He heaved and shoved and twisted. 'Twas no manner of use. He could not pass that gap without the removal of another plank, and there was not time for that. At any moment the *James* would ring eight bells. And at any moment then she would be under way.

Peter backed out of his predicament to an accompaniment of squeaking grunts, and I followed him, too bitterly disappointed for words. Escape had seemed so easy—and now we were condemned to two months aboard the *Walrus*, very likely to exceedingly uncomfortable deaths, for I fancied that Flint was the sort of man to lose his queer mixture of fear and respect for my great-uncle as soon as they were out of touch.

"Hold der light here, Bob," said Peter, squatting on the litter of the deck, and he proceeded to extract a splinter from his foot.

"*Ja*, dot's goodt," he went on, standing up. "Well, we don't get oudt dot way."

"Are you sure we could not tear off another plank?" I answered. "I might find a hammer—or a chisel——"

"Andt der noise brings der watch! *Neen*, we got a better chance."

"What, Peter?"

"You see!"

He felt his way toward the ladder to the cabin-hatch.

"Always there is another way, Bob. If one way is not goodt, der other maybe is better. *Ja!* You see."

He climbed the ladder silently in his bare feet until his great shoulders were directly beneath the square of the hatch, and I heard a faint grinding of straining metal, the crackling of tortured wood.

"*Ja*," he panted, desisting. "We do dot. Now you be ready, Bob. Jump oop, quick. Maybe we got to kill some fellers, andt if we do we don't let them holler."

I could feel his legs quivering above me;

the ladder itself vibrated under us. There was a whine, a sudden pop—and the hatch flew up in the air. Peter caught it on the flats of his hands before it could settle again and lifted it back. He was out in a flash, and I was hard on his heels.

We crouched on the main-cabin floor, staring about us for a sign of the pirates. The lights had all burned out, and it was several minutes before our eyes became adjusted to the star-shine that sifted through the stern window.

A snore from the settee which ran along beneath the windows brought both of us to our feet, and I bent over the table, fingers crooked, to clutch the throat of whoever it might be. But I was put to it not to laugh aloud as I looked into the flushed face and open mouth of Darby McGraw. Poor Darby! A little rum went a long way with him, and he loved to ape his elders.

"'Drink an' the devil—done for th' rest,'" he hiccupped in his sleep.

"He's safe," I murmured.

"*Ja*," whispered Peter, and busied himself reshutting the trap-door and arranging the bolt and hinges so as to conceal the fact of its having been forced.

We tiptoed into the companionway, and a very cannonade of snores assailed us from the staterooms on either hand. The doors stood open, and we looked in upon the prickly jowl of Flint, Bones' mottled cheeks and two other drunken underlings. Flint held a cocked pistol in his right hand, which was flung across his chest. Why he did not shoot himself only an obscure Providence can explain.

At the exit to the deck we tarried to reconnoiter our situation, and 'twas lucky we did so. Eight bells rang out from the *Royal James*, and a voice most astonishingly close muttered a curse.

"Ye might think they 'ad a blarsted hadmiral aboard," answered a second voice.

"I'll lay ye a castellano there was a whole watch awake on her the night long," said the first speaker.

A whistle shrilled, and the gruff voice of Saunders reached us quite distinctly ordering the topmen aloft.

"There they go, *Jemmy*," returned the second man. "We'll be free o' the swabs in another glass."

"And good riddance, says I," declared *Jemmy*, spitting into the scuppers.

I saw where they were then, leaning

against the starboard poop-ladder and peering overside at the vague hull of the *James*. Peter's little eyes had identified them, too, and his fingers sank into the flesh of my arm, signaling me to stay where I was. He glided past me on to the deck, his body ghostly in the gloom.

"I'm — if I can see as why we has to keep our peepers open," growled the second man.

"'Tain't long now till morning," replied Jemmy. "What d'ye s'y to a dash o' rum, matey?"

He half-turned, and saw Peter's enormous white bulk hovering over him, and his teeth gleamed as he opened his mouth involuntarily to scream.

"I don't care if—" the second man said.

The Dutchman leaped, and his two arms whipped out. Jemmy's scream died in a guttural cough. Peter grappled the throat of each. He held them poised for a moment, then brought their heads together with an odd hollow smack like the cracking of egg-shells. They collapsed inert on the deck.

I darted for the rail, but Peter stayed me.

"Neen, neen," he objected. "First I get me some pants, Bob. Andt we drop these fellers overboardt."

He was divesting the larger of the two of the single garment each one wore the while he talked, and, conquering an instinctive sensation of repugnance, I did likewise.

"Dot's better, *ja*," remarked Peter complacently. "A little tight; but I don't like it to be naked, Bob. *Neen!*"

He rose to his feet, buckling the dead man's belt around him.

"They'll splash!" I warned him as he picked up the big one.

"Nobody hears," he answered.

He lowered the body over the rail feet first, and the splash was less than I had expected. The second body followed with equal expedition, and Peter laid hold of one of several ropes that trailed untidily over the *Walrus'* side.

"Now we go, Bob," he said.



WE ENTERED the water almost together, and swam side by side down the anchorage toward the *James*. I realized at once that the tide had turned, for the ebb sucked us along at a rate vastly swifter than we could have achieved by our own unaided efforts, although Peter, despite his discomfort at sea,

was a remarkably powerful swimmer, thanks to his lifetime in the wilderness country of the frontier.

"The tide will take care of the dead men," I panted, stroking for all I was worth to keep pace with the Dutchman.

A whistle shrilled again aboard the *James*.

"*Ja*," said Peter. "Der anchor goes oop, Bob. We hurry!"

He was a dozen strokes ahead of me at the end. I found him hanging on to the heel of the rudder and calmly treading water. For'ard the capstan was clanking to a steady yo-ho-hoing and trampling of feet. Yards were banging, sails were slatting, men were shouting and calling.

"Anchor up-and-down, sir!" called Saunders.

My great-uncle's voice answered him.

"Very good! We will weigh. Oh, Master Martin, are you sure there is no boat from the *Walrus*? I could have sworn I heard the splash of the falls."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Martin. "I'll be — — — — — for a — — — — — if there is so much as a man awake aboard the — — — — — craft."

I looked up at the stern windows, so high above us. From our precarious perch on the rudder the *James* towered like Spy-glass Mountain, touchable but unattainable. Almost I could have cried out to my great-uncle and hailed him to have us hauled aboard. But common sense warned me he would certainly seize upon the opportunity to send us back to the *Walrus* as clinching evidence to Flint of his good faith. And I had no desire to face Flint with those two dead men to account for.

"What's to do?" I whispered to Peter, whose eyes were roving over the lofty stern. "We can not bide here. Once she has way on her, we'll be tossed off."

"*Ja*," agreed Peter. "You see dot shiny picture oop there?"

He indicated a golden sunburst, carved across the stern beneath the cabin windows. 'Twas a minor tragedy in my great-uncle's life that he was without the gold-leaf to make this part of his ship as immaculate as the rest. The constant battering of following seas had cracked and diminished the gilding, but the ridges and niches of the carving were still visible.

"Yes," I answered, puzzled.

"I climb oop on der rudder, andt I holdt me on to der roundness in der middle. Andt

you climb oop on to my shoulders andt into der cabin windows, *ja*."

"You can't hold me up in that position, Peter!" I exclaimed. "'Twould be all you could do to maintain yourself."

"I do it, *ja*," insisted Peter.

"But you? How will you——"

"You t'row me a rope."

He scrambled on to the rudder and slowly spread-eagled himself upward against the scrollwork which covered the stern. His hands, feeling blindly above his head, sought for and found a deep indentation in the rays below the center of the sunburst, and with this to cling to, he climbed a foot or two higher on to a shallow ridge which ran across the stern, a shelf scarce wide enough to give him toehold. His grip shifted with lightning precision, his fingers clamping themselves about the embossed figure of the sun, deeply carven for relief.

"Now you climb, Bob," he grunted.

I obeyed him without objection, for every breath was precious and the *James* was already adrift, her anchor merely a pendulous weight for'ard.

The rudder I surmounted with ease, standing erect with a hand on one of Peter's legs to steady me. I stepped up to the ridge upon which the Dutchman stood with no more difficulty, holding to his leather belt. Then I changed my hand-hold to a ridge in the carving, and by his direction braced the toes of one foot in the slack of his belt as I heaved myself upward. Peter grunted. That was all.

I found a new hand-hold and brought my other foot up on to Peter's shoulder and stood erect there. Reaching upward now, better than two tall men's height above the water-line, my groping finger-tips were still below the level of the stern windows. Peter sensed my difficulty.

"On my headt," he grunted.

I carefully lifted one foot, selected another hand-grip and mounted Peter's tow locks. Again I explored upward with one arm stretched to the limit of safety, but I failed by inches to clutch the sill of the stern windows.

"Jump," sobbed Peter.

"But you!"

"Jump!"

The rudder clacked as it was put over, and the *James* heeled slightly to the breeze. The water commenced to purr as she gathered way.

I jumped. Peter sagged beneath me, but the fingers of my right hand fastened upon the ledge of the window. I heard a splash, and caught hold with my left hand.

"Oop!" spluttered Peter from the water.

The rest was child's play compared to what had preceded it. The carving afforded toe-holds in plenty, and soon I had a leg over the windowsill and looked down at Peter, trailing in the *James'* wake as he clung to the shelf which crossed the stern perhaps a foot above the water. He dared no longer hold to the rudder.

His big face was so white that it frightened me, and I tumbled inboard without stopping to make sure the cabin was empty. But my luck was with me, and I scurried around to find a rope. This was a hopeless quest in that luxurious apartment, so I ran up the companionway and just inside the door to the deck came upon a lead-line, coiled and hung to a hook, which I appropriated.

Altogether these movements consumed less time than is required to describe them; but when I returned to the stern windows Peter was gone. I leaned out and stared back at the *James'* creaming wake—and a white arm flashed in a gesture of appeal twenty feet astern. I cast the lead behind him, and he caught the line as it settled into the water, cut the lead free with the dead man's knife at his belt, looped the slack under his shoulders, and with my feverish help hauled himself back to the shelf above the water line.

I lacked the strength to draw him up; but I fastened my end of the line to the cabin table, which was bolted to the floor, and then, foot by foot, Peter toiled upward. He was so weary at the last that I must pull him through the window, and he fell in a heap across the table, puddling the polished surface with the sea-water that streamed off him and the blood from his scarred hands.

A bottle of the *aqua vitae* my great-uncle favored stood by his place, and I took this and poured a liberal tot between Peter's lips. He staggered to his feet, blinking his eyes and red as a school miss.

"All right, Bob," he squeaked. "I be all right, *ja*."

His eyes chanced upon the lead-line, still fast to the table's leg, and he stooped and unknotted it and dropped it out of the window.

"We better not stay here," he muttered.
 "Neen! If Murray sees us——"

"Oh, my ——!"

Ben Gunn goggled at us from the companionway.

"Drowned, they be?" he gasped to himself. "He done for 'em, Flint did!"

I was afraid he would run out on deck and cry an alarm, and I started for him to prevent this. But the poor creature was fettered by superstitious fear.

"Dear Christ!" he mumbled. "It's a-comin' for me. Oh, sweet Lord, don't 'ee let the ghostie take Ben Gunn. Don't 'ee, now! A good, pious lad I was, as went to church reg'lar and said my catechism, and if my old mother could——"

"Be still, Ben," I said. "We don't mean to hurt you."

He plucked up a little courage when I spoke.

"'Tain't right for ye to talk," he objected. "I never heard tell as how sperets——"

"We're not spirits," I answered. "We are as live as you are. Here, feel this."

He shrank back as I placed my clammy, wet hand upon his neck, but the touch reassured him.

"Ye ain't sperets, says you," he repeated amazedly. "Nor ye ain't ghosts. And consekently ye ain't dead. And seein' as you're here, why, it do stand to reason as how ye ain't aboard the *Walrus*, which is where ye was and where ye oughter be."

He shook his head.

"'Tain't right, Master Ormerod, and don't follow in nature nohow."

"'Tis perfectly natural," I retorted. "Master Corlaer and I have escaped from the *Walrus*."

Ben came a step or two into the cabin and stared hard at Peter. Then he turned a disapproving eye upon the pools of water we had sprinkled on the table and the rich carpet.

"Well, it do look to be 'ee two," he conceded grudgingly. "But ye ha' mucked up the cabin awful, and the captain will be like to ha' me triced to the main for a round dozen wi' the cat."

"Not if you work quickly with a bucket and mop, Ben," I said, for I was as anxious as himself to conceal the traces of our entrance from Murray.

"Maybe so," he agreed. "But he won't like it that ye come aboard this way."

I seized upon this opening without scruple.

"Yes, he'll hold it against you, Ben. 'Tis a shame."

He shivered, and I appreciated what my great-uncle's wrath must be.

"Ye wouldn't let him now, Master Ormerod! Oh, say ye wouldn't! Ye don't want poor Ben Gunn to be screamin' on the triangle."

"That I don't," I assented warmly. "You must hide us, Ben. Hide us and clean up the cabin, and he'll never know we are aboard."

"Aye, but then?" he asked shrewdly.

"Oh, then 'twill not matter. Nobody will know that you had aught to do with our coming aboard; and indeed Captain Murray will not care, I think. 'Twas not of his own will he gave us to Flint."

"If 'tis so, why don't 'ee go up on the poop and tell the captain now?"

"He'd have to send us back to Captain Flint. You wouldn't like to be sent aboard the *Walrus* to stay, Ben."

Ben Gunn cocked his head on one side.

"I ain't so sure," he answered. "Maybe Flint would let me wear seaman's gear and tar my hair."

Despite the urgency of our plight I was interested in the humor of the steward's ambition.

"Aren't you satisfied with your lot?" I inquired.

"Not I!" he replied with unexpected determination. "Look 'ee, Master Ormerod, I went to sea for to be a swearin', cutlas-lashin' pirate, and they put me in a livery-shuit! All my life I been wearin' livery o' one kind or another. Now if you, or Cap'n Flint, we'll say, was to hail Ben Gunn and argyfy as how ye'd take him out o' [livery—never a livery-shuit again—and make him a reglar sailorman as pulls on ropes and climbs masts and holds a wheel and swabs decks—if you was to do all this, why, maybe Ben Gunn, he'd do 'most anything for you—or Cap'n Flint, if so be as Flint spoke fust."

"'Tis I speak first," I replied. "If I ever command a ship you shall be a tarry sailorman aboard her, Ben. Or if I don't have a ship of my own I'll help you to a berth on another such as you desire."

He came close to me, and his eyes bored into mine with an earnestness that was pathetic.

"That's a solemn-honest promise, ain't it, Master Ormerod? Ye wouldn't go for to fool Ben Gunn, would 'ee, now?"

"No, no," I promised. "But if you don't hide us quickly, Ben, I'll never be able to make good on it."

He caught my hand in his.

"You jest come along o' me. Ben Gunn knows a thing or two, he does. I'll show 'ee, my master. You jest come along o' me."

Peter and I sopped after him up the companionway to a door for'ard of the state-rooms we occupied, which led by way of a steep flight of ladder-stairs to the galley and service quarters, a space partitioned off from the vast sweep of the gundeck. Ben unhooked a lanthorn from the wall, opened a trap in the deck and signed us to follow him. At the bottom of a second ladder we found ourselves in a lazaret such as had been our prison aboard the *Walrus*. But there was this difference in our surroundings: That they were clean. The walls were whitewashed, and around them were ranged kegs and pipes of wines, ale and rum, and racks laden with bottles of various liquors.

"'Tis Murray's wine-cellar," I commented aloud.

Ben Gunn deposited the lanthorn in the middle of the floor and approached his mouth to my ear.

"Aye, and he keeps his treasure 'ere—when so be he has any," he whispered throatily.

"Doth he never come here?"

"Not he. Nor the naygurs, neither. Only Ben Gunn."

"What shall we do for food?"

Ben wiggled with embarrassment.

"Jest you leave that to Ben Gunn. He'll feed ye well, my master, as spoke kind to him and promises to take him out o' livery-shuits. Aye, that he will. And fetch ye clothes from the cabin. But don't 'ee forget the promise, sir. Oh, say ye won't!"

"I won't," I assured him. "But you must get back to the cabin and tidy up the mess we made. Haste, man!"

He scampered up the ladder as if the — were after him—or Paradise within view.

And during the two days of our stay in the wine-cellar of the *Royal James* he was as good as his word. He fed us well. He brought me a sufficiency of clothing. And he procured for Peter a quantity of linen

and cotton cloth, with thread and needles, with which the Dutchman fashioned himself garments to cover his inconveniently large body.

On the evening of the second day, having learned from Ben that the *James* had logged several hundred knots since leaving the *Rendezvous*, we decided 'twould be safe to appear before Murray, and we took an opportunity whilst Ben was serving his dinner to ascend through the galley and present ourselves in the main cabin.

My great uncle was poring over the chart of the Caribbean which so frequently engaged his attention, but he glanced up as he heard the shuffling of our feet on the carpet. A furrow of perplexity was dug betwixt his eyes. Otherwise he revealed no astonishment.

"So! You two have taken matters into your own hands! Did you by any chance slay Flint?"

"We might have," I answered. "But we did not."

"A pity in the circumstances," he ruminated. "—'s blood! Here is a pretty coil! Peter, I'll wager I have you to thank for it."

"Ja," said Peter, and sat himself in his accustomed place at the table.

"'Tis true," I agreed, "that without Peter we might not have escaped, but the responsibility is equally mine."

"How did you compass it?"

I told him, and he stared curiously at Peter, placidly eating across the table from him.

"I might have known it, Peter. No man ever held you in constraint against your will. I might have known it. What a mess! My plans and combinations all askew! Peter, y'have played at bowls with destiny! A half-hour since I saw my way clear. Now I must plot it fresh. Stap me, what a coil!"

He rose and started to walk the cabin, hands clasped behind him, head on his chest. Suddenly he paused in front of me.

"What moved you to such a desperate course, Robert?"

His tawny eyes glowed with the light of inner speculation.

"Was it to be with me? Or was it O'Donnell's lass?"

I hesitated, frankly loath to hurt him.

"I was concerned for her," I admitted finally. "This ship is no fit place for a maid, as I have said before."

"'Tis better than some," he answered.

But my reply did not seem to annoy him. His gaze dwelt upon my face for several moments longer.

"Well, well," he said as he began to pace the carpet again. "We must make the best of it, lad."

CHAPTER XII

THE TREASURE SHIP

THERE was no hint of triumph in my great-uncle's manner as the sloop came about and lay to under our lee quarter; nor did he exhibit excitement when she unloosed the small boat she towed astern and a half-dozen swarthy fellows commenced to pull it toward us. He indulged in a pinch of snuff and took his station by the starboard rail at the break of the poop. Peter and I followed him. Besides us there was only Martin, who stood aft by the man at the wheel. For'ard on the spar-deck men slouched away from the starboard bulwarks as Murray appeared. The gunports were all closed because of the swell which rolled the *Royal James* until it seemed she must dip her yard-arms under. So I think—aside from the lookouts lashed in the crosstrees of all three masts—we on the poop were the only ones who watched the little boat come sliding across the great, heaving mountains of water that surged out of the misty reaches of the Caribbean as if they would overflow the shores of Hispaniola, which loomed purple in the north beyond leagues of indigo sea.

The rowboat was as infinitesimal as an insect in those tossing wastes; but the man at the steering-oar guided it with uncanny skill, up the toppling crests that threatened to crush it, down the dizzy steeps that bade fair to hurl it to the ocean's oozy bottom, and brought it to rest a scant fifty feet from the *James'* hull, his long sweep fending and twisting dark to maintain the position. He was very dark and lean, with bare, corded limbs and a sinewy trunk covered by the remnants of a cotton shirt and trousers. His hair was a stringy black. His voice, when he spoke in answer to a sign from my great-uncle, was harshly rhythmical, but what he said I could not understand, for both he and Murray used Spanish.

My great-uncle asked two questions, both brief, and he answered as briefly. My great-

uncle waved his hand again; he dug his steering-oar into the crest of one of the monstrous surges, and the little boat shot away like a roundshot from a gun. A few moments later we saw them make fast to the sloop and leap aboard, one by one. The sloop hauled her wind and beat off to westward in long, slanting tacks, and the *James* was once more alone in the western mouth of the Mona Passage, Hispaniola a blur in the north and Porto Rico somewhere out of sight southeast of us.

Murray dusted a second pinch of snuff into his nostrils as he turned from the rail.

"Our three weeks' waiting hath not been in vain," he said. "The *Santissima Trinidad* was to sail from Porto Bello within the forty-eight hours after Diego put forth. She will be up with us in another five days—before the week is over at the latest."

I was conscious of a conflict of emotions.

"She may slip by you. 'Tis a wide gut—and what's to do if she comes in the night?"

"She can not slip by," returned my great-uncle. "For all the leagues of channel and the darkness of the nights, she can not slip by, Robert. The fools have delivered her into our hands. By her sailing-orders, so Diego told me, she must hug the south shore of Hispaniola, that she may be within easy run of Santo Domingo in case of accident. As for the nights, she'll be lighted up like Bartholomew's Fair."

"Ja, it's all right if dot Englishman we sighted last week don't find a frigate," said Peter.

Murray's face fell a trifle.

"Yes, we have always that to reckon with," he acknowledged. "Stap me, I see not what the fellow could have suspected to send him kiting from us. But with any luck he'll not flush a frigate this side of Jamaica, and that should give us time."

"If he suspected us, why not some of the other craft that have passed us on our beat?" I interjected. "There ha' been plenty."

My great-uncle pointed to the white ensign floating from the main.

"They were all Spaniards or Frenchmen," he answered. "They took us for a King's ship. No, there's little chance of interference. If there is—" his jaw squared—"I'll hunt the *Santissima Trinidad* into Cadiz port."

He broke off abruptly.

"Master Martin!"

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the mate, stepping forward from the wheel.

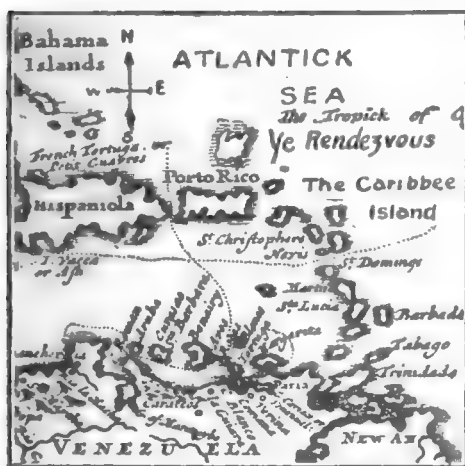
"I would have all lookouts notified that I shall give ten onzas to him who first hails the deck for a large Spaniard of forty-four guns coming from the west. She'll show a red-and-yellow light o' nights at her fore-peak. You will also see that all men sent aloft carry night-glasses."

Martin touched his forelock.

"Aye, aye, sir! I'll pipeclay the ——— who misses the ——— dago. Curse me for a lubber, but I knew there must be fat game a-comin' after such a spell o' idleness."

"She'll be the fattest prize we have ever boarded," rejoined Murray. "You may tell all hands as much."

There was no formal mustering of the *James*' crew; but Martin evidently had his own means of circulating information, for the polyglot seamen had shaken off their lethargy and sullen quiet within a glass of the sloop's departure. All around the decks



men were oiling pistols, sharpening cutlasses and whispering in secret. Coupeau was busier than ever about the battery, testing breech-ropes, pinning tighter carriage-wheels, filing glassy-smooth a pile of shot for the chase-guns that might be called upon to lop a vital spar at extreme range.

But nothing happened that day or the next. And so three more days passed with increasing tension. The lookouts in the crosstrees were relieved every two hours, that the men's vision might be fresh and unstrained. The sight of a sail anywhere on the horizon sent the crew scampering to

the guns and swung the ship's bows in that quarter; and four times in those five days the *James* boomed down upon Spanish fishermen, a Martinico brig, a Yankee schooner and a Plymouth snow, tacking away again the moment she identified each one as impossible to be her prey.

The sixth day was like its predecessors, blazing hot, bubbling the pitch out of the deck-seams, a gentle sou'east breeze barely sufficient to keep the sails drawing. The swell, which had bothered us for several weeks, had almost disappeared, and the Caribbean might have been a landlocked lake. Daylight found us farther to the south than we usually plied, since Murray feared the Spaniard might have missed his reckoning and shifted the designed course he was to follow.

For the first time in days we could descry the shadowy hills of Porto Rico as we wore around and beat north again. As the sun rose higher a haze danced along the horizon's rim. Porto Rico was swallowed up; Hispaniola's soaring peaks were buried before we had come within normal view of them.

Noon observation saw us returned to our customary station, and to guard against the possibility that the *Santissima Trinidad* had passed us in the heat-haze whilst we were beating up from the south my great-uncle ran down the wind into the mouth of the passage for several glasses. We encountered a fishing-periagua then, and the Indians of its crew shouted back to Murray's question that no great ship had entered the passage that day. So back again we beat to windward the whole weary afternoon.

Night brought rest to nobody. Even my great-uncle paced the poop by the hour, snatching an occasional nap upon a pallet which Ben Gun laid for him where it would catch the breeze. Peter and I dozed on the deck-planks with the crew.

In the shadowy hour that precedes the dawn the hail came from the mast-head—

"Lights ho!"

Murray was on his feet as quickly as any of us.

"How do you make them?" he trumpeted.

"Red and yellow, over and under," answered the main crosstrees.

"Very good," replied my great-uncle.

"Master Martin, you will single out that man and present him this purse."

He handed it over.

"Pipe all hands to breakfast, and serve an extra ration of rum."

"Aye, aye, sir," sighed Martin. "And here's to luck, — — — my eyes!"



THE dawn came all at once, as if a magician had waved his wand.

A crimson glow in the east, soft at first, then spreading and deepening, and the light expanded almost like an explosion in the night. The red disk of the sun lifted over the horizon. And it was day. Westward, perhaps half a league, a great ship was wallowing toward us before the freshening wind. The coloring of her figurehead sparkled in the level rays which touched her dingy canvas and turned the sails to cloth-of-gold. The gaudy banner of Spain flapped with a splendid insolence in the pure light. The spray which was tossed over her bowsprit as she buried her stem in the easy swell was transformed into threaded amethysts, turquoises, emeralds.

"She is heavy-laden!" exclaimed my great-uncle, staring at her through his prospect-glass.

"Heavy-armed too," I added, pointing at the band of cannon along her sides.

"We'll make light of that," he answered. "But I shall have to pay somewhat for my Quixotic promise to you, Robert, to spare her crew. Ho, Coupeau!" he hailed the gunner who was passing on the spardeck.

The former galley-slave turned his terrible face to the poop and saluted.

"Pass the word, Coupeau, that the prize must not be pierced betwixt wind and water. I would bring down a spar or two at the beginning of the action, but concentrate your fire upon her decks."

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

"But what of O'Donnell and his daughter!" I exclaimed. "On a shot-swept deck!"

My great-uncle regarded me curiously.

"'Tis not a game of lawn bowls we are about to play, Robert," he replied. "I ask you to remember that the Spaniard carries forty-four cannon which he will discharge against us, with some probability of slaying certain of our people, including perhaps ourselves."

"But the girl!"

He took snuff.

"Tut, tut, my boy! You concern yourself needlessly. 'Tis a risky business and can not be otherwise. Yet she'll probably come safe through it. What part do you

and Peter's purpose to play in the action?"

I was about to answer hotly that we would have naught to do with piracy when Peter said—

"Maybe we better go aboardt der Spaniard and catch der little gal, *ja*."

"An excellent idea," returned my great-uncle, looking expectantly at me. "I shall lead the boarders myself, and in the confusion I may be hard put to it single-handed to direct the fighting and save the O'Donnells from injury. If you two——"

"We'll do it," I said ungraciously. "'Tis of a parcel with your crazy notions that you can not even safeguard your accomplice without aid."

"That is quite true," he agreed mildly. "I am free to admit, Robert, your presence takes a load off my mind, notwithstanding your escape from Flint hath created other difficulties for me to contend with. However, I shall be sufficiently grateful to you if you will assist me. My notions, whether 'crazy' or not, are not easily carried into execution."

I nodded to the white ensign at the main peak.

"Will you fight under false colors?"

"They are not false," he retorted with tightened lips. "We fight for England today."

"England and Flint and Long John Silver and Bill Bones and Martin and Coupeau and——"

"Myself? Perhaps. But if those you have named share in the rewards of victory 'tis that England may profit thereby and the Good Cause triumph. What doth it matter if King James return to London?"

"What indeed?" I echoed sarcastically, yet impressed against my will by his deadly earnestness.

"'Tis not my way, Robert, to fight under false colors," he proceeded, as if determined to argue me over to his viewpoint. "Any sailorman will tell you that, whatever other slander he may relate of Captain Rip-Rap. As for the Jolly Roger—pho! 'Tis a tradition required by any pirate crew. I look upon it as a somewhat humorous attempt to terrify the timid; but I ha' fought under it without shame, since 'tis the only emblem of the sea outlaw. But today 'tis different. We fight, not as pirates, but as servants of King James."

A white puff of smoke jetted from our fo'csle, and a cracking explosion smote our

ears. Coupeau had fired the first shot from one of the chase guns, long eighteens, beautiful bronze pieces of prodigious range. Involuntarily we all focused our eyes upon the treasure-ship, and a cheer from the gun-crews applauded the flapping rent that showed in the bulge of the Spaniard's foretops'l.

"Excellent!" murmured my great-uncle.

The *Santissima Trinidad* staggered for an instant like a man who has been struck unexpectedly by one he supposed to be a friend. Then she yawed to give us a full view of her colors; and as she yawed, broadening the target, Coupeau fired again. 'Twas a low shot, fired as the *James* dropped into the trough betwixt two waves, and all we could see of it was that apparently it plowed into the waist.

The Spaniard fired a gun to leeward and put over his helm, aiming to cross our bows and head up for Santo Domingo. Plainly he did not know what to make of the incident. To all appearances the *Royal James* was a King's ship. She showed the English naval ensign. To a Spanish eye at any rate she might well seem to possess the solidly rakish aspect which was the usual keynote of an English frigate. So he evidently decided that hostilities must have broken out between the two countries, and in obedience to his sailing-orders endeavored to avoid a fight and make for the nearest fortified Spanish port.

But the *James* sailed two feet to the treasure-ship's one; and, splendidly handled, we overhauled her within a glass of the first shot. In the mean time Coupeau kept pecking away at her, and as we came within range of our main battery her foretopmast crashed, covering her fo'csle with a tangle of top-hamper.

This was too much for her people, and she put up her helm, brought her entire battery to bear and let fly at us with all her starboard metal. 'Twas a poorly managed salvo, yet three or four round-shot swished across our decks, and an eighteen-pounder smashed a couple of men to jelly just for'ard of the poop.

Murray stepped to the poop-rail to examine the damage and shouted to Coupeau:

"Hold your broadside, Master Gunner! He must come to clear his decks."

And to Martin, who was conning the ship:

"Bear up! Bear up! He still hath the weather gage of us."

Coupeau, working like a madman with his chase guns, was firing both together, laid on the same target, and now he succeeded in cutting down the foremast about twenty feet from the deck, sending the heavy spar and billowing canvas a-tumbling after the fallen topmast. The bulk of the wreckage fell overside, dragging the *Santissima Trinidad* down by the head and forming a sea-anchor to hold her stationary.

My great-uncle smiled with grim satisfaction.

"Ho, Saunders!" he hailed the second mate, who was stationed amidships. "Rig grappling-irons on the port bulwarks. We'll round the Spaniard as he lies."

The *Royal James* forged abeam of the treasure-ship, approaching at an angle which diminished the effectiveness of her second broadside, and as we entered the filmy cloud-bank of smoke from her guns Murray gave the order to fire.

"Let go your broadside, Coupeau!" he called.

The gunner ran to the open main-hatch and bellowed the order down to the gun-deck. The planks seemed to spring under our feet. A thunderous series of detonations shook the *James'* whole fabric. The smoke-clouds were first driven away, then thickened to an impalpable mist, and the acrid stench of saltpeter and brimstone was choking in the nostrils. I had a wavery glimpse of a vast gilded figurehead, a heap of torn canvas and rigging.

"Sta'b'd your helm, Master Martin!" shouted Murray.

We headed up into the wind with much creaking of yards and slatting of sails, and I heard faintly a clamor of wailing outcries from the smoke-bank that masked the *Santissima Trinidad*. Almost at once our broadside roared again, the red flames from the gun-muzzles licking out like hungry tongues. Another dim vision of shot-rent bulwarks and towering sails, and the gray gloom became denser than ever. Figures on our own deck were indistinct in it.

The Spaniard blindly returned our fire as the *James* felt her way toward him, the thunder of the two broadsides overpowering, numbing, like the roaring of two beasts fighting in the night. I felt my great-uncle's hand on my arm; his voice was low, but distinct.

"We shall soon be broadside on with her," he said. "The O'Donnells will be on the

poop. You had best get for'ard, Robert. If we board from abaft the foremast 'twill place you strategically to seize upon them. Where is Peter?"

The Dutchman leaned through the smoke-whorls.

"We better go aboardt der Spaniard, *ja*, Murray?" he answered calmly.

My great-uncle chuckled as he dusted snuff into his nostrils.

"We had, friend Peter. And you and Robert had best carry arms. I fear the Spaniards will not seek to differentiate betwixt you and my wicked self."

"*Ja*," assented Peter. "We go."

Amidships we encountered Saunders and a horde of men pouring up from the gun-deck to augment the boarding-parties. Peter and I tarried to select weapons from a rack by the mainmast. He took a boarding-pike, and I contented myself with a cutlas.

Murray, having inspected the grapplings and ascertained that hooks had been rigged from our yard-arms to clutch the Spaniard's rigging, rejoined us. He was dressed with his usual exquisite taste in watered gray silk, with white silk stockings and gray shoes with jeweled buckles. He wore no hat, and his white hair was clubbed and cued. The only weapon he carried was a dress-sword, which he held unsheathed.

"An end to our immediate worries soon, Robert," he announced cheerfully. "The action has gone perfectly. I would not have varied a move so far. We have not lost a dozen men."

 A FINAL blast from our guns tore the smoke-clouds to shreds, and a vagrant wind-puff snatched them aside. 'Twas like the drawing of the curtain at a play. The treasure-ship lurched helplessly not twenty fathoms distant, her rigging in tatters, her spars split and wounded, her fo'csle and foredeck one red litter, her bulwarks splintered, gunports blown in, guns dismounted. A handful of men were laboring to cut loose the wreck of the foremast, and a few other brave fellows were still fighting a couple of guns which raked us as the bowsprit of the *James* nudged over rail.

The two ships jolted together, and in response to wind and helm the *Royal James* swung broadside on against the Spaniard, our bowsprit becoming entangled in her

mizzen rigging. A dozen grappling-irons clattered in air and ground their hooks into her bulwarks. There was a brisk popping of small-arms, an exchange of threats and shouts of defiance.

My great-uncle, regardless of the firing, mounted the breach of a carronade which elevated him above the bulwarks, and Peter and I climbed into the forerigging, whence we had a fair view of both decks. The port bulwarks of the *Royal James* were crowded with men. Stripped to the waist, their lowering faces smuttied with powder-stains, their hairy chests barred with tattooing, their backs more often than not scarred by the cruel welts of the lash, they tussled for first place and clung with their bare toes wherever there was a bit of running gear or an inch of space, gripping cutlases in their teeth to leave hands free for pistol work or to steady themselves as they waited an opportunity to leap the narrowing gap between the vessels.

My eyes strayed to the Spaniard's decks. Little knots of men ran about confusedly. A stolid-looking fellow aimed a pistol at me, and a ratline over my head fell apart. Officers were driving the sailors forward to meet us. A man in a laced coat and periwig was shouting orders from the poop, and my pulse quickened, for at his shoulder was the lanthorn-jawed face of Colonel O'Donnell—aye, and in rear of both a skirt fluttered in the midst of a huddle of raven-black figures, priests and nuns.

"Jump!" squeaked Peter in my ear.

We jumped together, but my great-uncle was ahead of us. He leaped all of ten feet, sword in hand, alighted on the Spaniard's bulwarks, poised himself a moment and dropped into the center of a ring of foes. Before he had recovered his balance he parried the slash of a cutlas and pinked an antagonist in the throat. And he beat down a leveled pistol as I gained the treasure-ship's deck, inclined his head to avoid a murderous blow, ran the man through and almost in the same breath stepped a pace to the right to engage a fourth opponent—and all this with the cool precision of a fencing-master, unhurried, a flush of obvious enjoyment on his pallid cheeks.

But I saw no more. My task was to fight my way aft and protect the O'Donnells, and Peter and I turned our backs upon the struggle amidships. One wave of the pirates

stormed in Murray's wake; the rest followed Peter and me. They were as brave as they were vicious, and we made rapid progress and were nearly at the foot of the poop-ladder on the port side when Murray's whistle shrilled behind us. I realized too that both O'Donnell and the officer in the laced coat were shouting volubly, the one in English and the other in Spanish, trying to make themselves heard above the din.

"—asks parley," came in broken phrases from O'Donnell. "—can not understand—regrettable mistake—"

"Der Spaniard wants quarter," grunted Peter.

Indeed those of the *Santissima Trinidad's* men who had been resisting us promptly flung down their arms, glad of the excuse to quit the fight; but the wolves of the *James'* crew were not schooled to show mercy, and they killed three poor —s before Peter and I could knock up their cutlasses.

Murray's whistle blew a second time. There was a sudden hush, punctuated by the grinding of the two vessels, the thudding of unshod feet as more of the *James'* pirates dropped aboard the treasure-ship, the gagging cries of the wounded, the nasal sing-song of a priest pattering Latin prayers.

I seized the opportunity to look around. We were too close under the poop to see what went on beyond the rail directly overhead; but the maindeck, fore and aft, was a pitiful spectacle—cluttered with wreckage and dead men and bits of men and men wounded in every conceivable fashion, its yellow-sand carpet gemmed with carmine pools and rivulets.

My great-uncle, as immaculate as when he had ascended the *James'* bulwarks, stood a little ahead of the mass of his followers, his serene face and rich clothing in startling contrast with their nakedness and frank brutality. A trickle of blood dripped from the point of his slender sword. His attitude was that of an honorable man who wishes to be reasonable in a difficult situation.

"I believe I heard an appeal for quarter," he said quietly.

"Sir, you did," replied O'Donnell. "I have spoken for the gentleman beside me, Señor Don Ascanio de Hurtado y Custa, who is captain of this vessel."

"I am honored, sir," returned my great-uncle. "And yourself?"

O'Donnell did not altogether relish the

playing of his part. He bit his lip and hesitated an instant before he answered.

"I am Colonel O'Donnell, an officer in the service of his Most Catholic Majesty."

"Ah; and what can I do for you, gentlemen?" inquired my great-uncle.

O'Donnell hesitated again and conferred with the Spanish officer.

"Sir," he said then, "Don Ascanio asks you by me: Since when have your country and Spain been at war?"

"To the best of my knowledge, they are not at this present," my great-uncle answered blandly.

"Then to what cause must we attribute this — this — ah — unwarrantable attack?" demanded O'Donnell.

"I am afraid," replied my great-uncle almost with sorrow, "that I am unable to satisfy your curiosity upon that point."

The Spaniard burst into a declaration of passionate intensity, which Murray interrupted.

"I am so fortunate as to comprehend the noble Spanish tongue," he said. "Would you be so kind, Colonel O'Donnell, as to acquaint your friend with that fact, and to assure him that I regret he must accept the situation as it stands? I am desirous of sparing the lives of those of his people who survive, but at a pinch I will slay them all to compass my intention."

"And what is that?" asked O'Donnell.

"To relieve Don Ascanio of the consignment of treasure he carries," answered my great-uncle. "When it is aboard my ship he shall be at liberty to continue his voyage."

O'Donnell proceeded haltingly to translate this statement. He never finished it. The Spaniard launched a fresh torrent of curses, broke his sword across his knee and tossed the pieces overside. My great-uncle nodded sympathetically.

"'Tis an unpleasant plight, I know," he said. "Had Don Ascanio not discarded his sword I should have been delighted to yield him an opportunity for such satisfaction as one gentleman may give another."

"However—I must stipulate further, Colonel O'Donnell, that the crew of the *Santissima Trinidad* shall be placed in confinement for so long as suits my purpose. Any resistance must cause additional bloodshed, which, I am sure, you will agree is unnecessary."

"Don Ascanio will say no more," returned

O'Donnell. "He washes his hands of the whole proceeding. Abandoned by his crew——"

"Enough," interrupted my great-uncle.

He rattled off a sentence in Spanish, and there was an answering rattle of arms thrown on the deck. He spoke again, and the *Santissima Trinidad's* men all shifted to starboard and marched into the fo'csle, herded by a bristle of pirate cutlasses.

Murray walked aft to where Peter and I still stood, uncertain what to do next.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"I think she is in that group of priests and nuns under the stern lanthorn," I said.

He compressed his lips, a habit he had whenever he must turn to some task he did not overly care for.

"'Tis a trick I shall find as distasteful as O'Donnell did our colloquy just now," he said shortly. "But we must be about it without delay. Our cannonade will have been heard ashore in Hispaniola with this wind. We must gather our loot and away."

CHAPTER XIII

TROUBLE BOARDS THE 'ROYAL JAMES

THE silence was oppressive as we ascended the poop ladder. A last babble of Latin ended on an hysterical note. The Spanish captain glared his hatred, gnawing at his hands as he leaned against the rail, and when my great-uncle drew a laced handkerchief from his coat pocket and began to wipe clean his red blade 'twas more than Don Ascanio could stand. He stalked to the far side of the deck, rumbling curses, and fixed his gaze upon the purple of Hispaniola. Behind the steering-wheel the black flock of religious gathered closer under the great, gilded lanthorn which crowned the high, pulpit-like recess intended to protect the helmsman; and amongst those cowed shaven-heads and shapeless, swathed forms the slim grace and sunny, blue eyes of Moira O'Donnell were as patent as the growing fear with which her father met us.

My great-uncle nodded a satisfaction I was unable to comprehend.

"A fair maid, Robert!" he exclaimed. "Well, well! This is fine. I might ask no better. I congratulate you, *chevalier*," he added to O'Donnell. "Your daughter is as

dainty a little lady as I have seen in a long life."

O'Donnell understood his mood no better than I.

"I wish she was out of this," he growled resentfully. "Don Ascanio has placed the conduct of matters in my hands. What is next? Must you——"

He gestured expressively toward the vessel beneath us.

"It seems— I—I find myself— 'Tis a nauseating prospect— Several hundred men—and priests and nuns, Murray— Aye, a cardinal sin, one I'll never have absolution for, whatever betide——"

"You concern yourself without cause," said Murray soothingly. "We have arranged it differently, and to that end I shall act a part with your daughter which you must support; aye, to the offering of violence. And now, tell me, where is the treasure?"

"In the lazaret."

"Master Saunders!" called my great-uncle.

The second mate thrust his way to the front of the mob of pirates on the main deck.

"Take fifty men and break out a quantity of treasure from the lazaret of the prize."

"Aye, aye, sir," returned Saunders, and the pirates fell over themselves in their alacrity to have a hand in his business.

My great-uncle concluded the cleaning of his sword, crossed to the port railing and tossed the bloodied handkerchief overboard.

"Oh, Master Martin," he hailed the mate on the poop of the *Royal James*.

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Martin. "—— my gizzards for a ——, but we ha' done a clean job this morning."

"I find myself in agreement with your sentiments, Martin," replied my great-uncle. "Be so good as to have a whip rigged from the foreyard-arm to sling aboard the treasure which Saunders is breaking out. You will also tell off a score or two of men to make any essential repairs at once. I would have the ship ready to sail as soon as we cast off, which will be the moment the prize's cargo is transhipped."

"Aye, aye, sir, I'll 'tend to it all myself," Martin assured him. "—— my eyes for a —— and all the Twelve Apostles, blast 'em for a —— lot of ——."

"A pungent fellow, Martin!" commented my great-uncle, recrossing the deck. "But we must play our little comedy here. You, *chevalier*, are cast for the *Anguished Parent*. I am the *Aged Libertine*. Peter is the *Mute* with the bow-string—be gentle, Peter. Robert—humph! I scarce know how to describe your rôle, Robert. You, shall we say, are to be *Youth*? Ah, yes! *Youth*, immortal, selfish, impulsive, acquisitive, mendacious——"

Colonel O'Donnell regarded him as if he had lost his sanity.

"What folderol is this?" he broke in.

"You shall see," answered Murray. "'Tis our way of carrying you off without focusing the suspicion of Don Ascanio and his people upon your personal participation in this interesting episode. But to continue the enumeration of our cast. Your daughter, of course, is the *Innocent Victim*.

"And this, Robert, leads me to recast you. I shall deny you the satisfaction of virtue—which after all, the clergy tell us, is its own reward. You shall be *Youthful Wantonness*, and did we adopt all the exigencies of the plot 'twould be necessary for you finally to strive with me for the possession of the maid. But we will wave that anon. Play up to me, nephew! You, too, Peter!"

He left us and walked with a mincing gait, entirely different from his real catlike prow, up to the black-garbed cluster surrounding Mistress O'Donnell.

"Stap me, a fair piece, this!" he drawled. "Too fair to bloom unseen. Come hither, mistress!"

A fat monk spat an ejaculation at him in Spanish, and two of the nuns threw their arms around the Irish girl.¹ Murray replied to the monk in his own tongue, and with a virulent fluency which inspired the whole group with pitiful terror. But the maid answered him so dauntlessly that it made the blood prickle in my neck.

"A black shame on you, old enough to be the father of me and these others here! I know you for what you are, Captain Rip-Rap, and if you will be thinking I am one to fear you it is a sorry awakening you will have. Oh, you might better be down on your knees, asking pardon for the wickedness you have wrought, than plotting fresh evil, and threatening holy folk with your dreadful torments!"

The fat monk lifted a crucifix like a weapon and shook it in his face, and Mis-

tress O'Donnell put the two nuns aside and stood forth in front of the group, with her arms spread wide to shelter them.

"So you recognize me?" said my great-uncle. "'Tis an honor, mistress. But I fear you have heard much to my prejudice, and I must press you to visit my ship and learn the contrary. Certes, you should be the first to rejoice to disprove such foul allegations against an aged man."

"Step forward, colonel, and defend her," I muttered under my breath to her father.

He had the grace to blush, but he acted upon my suggestion with a semblance of sincerity.

"Sir, sir, what is this you do?" he cried. "Certes, there is some limit to your law-breaking! The maid is my daughter."

My great-uncle went through his snuff ritual with an artful exaggeration which was comical to one who knew him.

"Unfortunate!" he drawled. "I could sympathize with you, sir."

And to me—

"Robert, you will conduct the lady to the *James*."

For the first time Mistress O'Donnell's glance lighted fair upon my face.

"Master Ormerod!" she gasped.

I jumped toward her with as roughly peremptory a manner as I could assume.

"You'd best come quietly, mistress," I snapped.

She flung out her hands to fend me off, and the fat monk and the two nuns cast themselves upon us, the monk striking at my head with his heavy crucifix and the nuns scratching and clawing so that I was put to it to protect my eyes. They were surely three of the bravest people who ever lived, and but for Peter they would have worsted me.

The big Dutchman waded stolidly into the confusion, shoved O'Donnell from his path, upset the monk and pushed the two nuns out of the way.

"You take der little gal, Bob," he squeaked.

She struggled with all the strength in her lissome body, but I pinned her hands and tossed her over my shoulder—and then her father attacked me with the Spanish captain, whose patience had been exhausted by this last outrage.

Murray drew his sword and forced the Spaniard back, and Peter slung O'Donnell over his shoulder as easily as I had the maid.

"I got him, *ja*," he announced to Murray. My great-uncle sheathed his sword.

"Carry him along," he said. "Since he is so much concerned as to his daughter's fate, we will permit him to watch it. Afterward, it may be, he can afford us some additional amusement. Stap me, a most persistent fellow!"

The fat monk picked himself up from the deck, waving his crucifix, and launched a tumult of invective which my great-uncle received with raised eyebrows and an occasional humorous interjection. But I had my hands full controlling my prisoner, and paid no more attention to what happened on the poop after I reached the main-deck ladder.

A line of pirates staggered across the deck, backs stooped beneath burdens of portly casks and iron-bound chests, wire-wrapped and padlocked, each a-dangle with leaden seals impressed with the arms of the Spanish king. They leered at my writhing captive and grinned openly at the ridiculous spectacle presented by Colonel O'Donnell's lank form draped over Peter's shoulder. But they all looked quickly away as my great-uncle descended to us.

"Can you manage her alone?" he asked me curtly.

My temper was thoroughly aroused by the false position in which I had been placed, and I vented it upon him.

"I'll manage her or go overboard with her," I barked.

He smiled.

"The right spirit, lad! Tut, tut, mistress," as she wrenched a hand free and dug at my eyes. "You concern yourself for nothing. We have but played at a game. Observe your father's attitude."

"The greater his shame!" she hissed. "That he should have suffered you to take me alive!"

"We are friends," urged my relative, lowering his voice. "'Tis but a pretense we make——"

"Friends!"

Her white teeth clicked in an effort to bite my ear.

"Ah, you are friends to the Powers of Evil."

"Be patient a little longer, Moira," pleaded her father from his perch on Peter's shoulder. "I'll explain——"

She went of a sudden entirely limp and bust into a passion of weeping.

"Oh, *padre, padre*, to think of you a coward! 'Tis worst of all!"

O'Donnell swore helplessly.

"Let me down till I settle her mind," he begged.

But Murray rebuked him.

"They are watching you from the poop, *chevalier*. Struggle as much as you please—'tis all one to Peter—but if you value your future security in Spain do not seem to give in to us."



I CLIMBED by way of a carronade on to the port bulwarks, holding Mistress O'Donnell with one arm the while I hooked a strand of rigging with the other; and even as I collected myself to jump the gap that separated the two vessels she twisted free of me and would have slid over-side—to be crushed to death, most likely, for the two hulls were continually grinding together. I caught her in the nick of time, letting go my clutch upon the rigging, and was near to being dragged down with her, teetering back and forth as aimless as a feather blown by the wind. So that, what with her struggles and my own loss of balance, I gritted my teeth and jumped most precariously, hit or miss, and, I am bound to admit, landed upon the *James'* bulwarks rather by good fortune than skill.

I dropped to the deck in no very pleasant mood. Faith, I could have slapped the tear-stained face that was pressed against my shoulder; and in the excess of my disgust I thrust her from me.

"An ill recompense for one that hath been at pains to spare your father's reputation, mistress," I growled, as surly as any pirate of the crew. "You might ha' been my death."

She looked at me, too surprized to answer at once, and before she had recovered herself my great-uncle and Peter joined us, Peter still placidly carrying Colonel O'Donnell like a flour-sack.

Murray cast a swift glance of appraisal around his ship.

"We have come through very creditably," he remarked.

Martin hailed him from the poop.

"By your leave, sir, we're whole aloft, 'ceptin' a few ropes as the topmen are splicin' and a rent in the mizzen royal."

"That's well," replied my great-uncle. "How many casualties?"

"We ha' put twelve overside, and there's

two as'll follow, and twenty ——— lubbers as must nurse their carkisses."

"Very good, Martin. I shall be in the cabin. Let me know so soon as the prize's treasure is all aboard."

He turned to us.

"The curtain is ready to fall upon our comedy. Will you accept my arm, Mistress O'Donnell? A glass of wine and a bite of sailor's fare will taste better than Robert's ear, which your hunger prompted you to nibble. Fie, fie, my lass!"

She stared at him with utter horror, yet suffered him to place her hand upon his arm. The spirit was gone out of her, exhausted by the strain she had been subjected to. And I forgot my anger at sight of the agony of dumb fear mirrored in her lovely eyes. She was like a butterfly spiked on a thorn.

Something of the same sensation must have affected my relative, for he patted the limp hand on his arm with a truly paternal kindness.

"Come, come, did I not say the comedy was ended?" he chided her. "I have played the *Aged Libertine*, 'tis true, but the rôle is now abandoned. You are as safe here as in your Spanish convent. But the deck is too public for our revelations. We will seek the seclusion of the cabin, and there the complete tale shall be unfolded for your reassurance, with your father a witness to support it."

She shook her head.

"I—I—know not what you mean."

"To be sure," he agreed. "But you soon shall."

Peter, behind us, grunted to command Murray's attention.

"Does der colonel walk or ride?"

"Stap me!" exclaimed my great-uncle, "I was forgetting your father's present plight, mistress."

"I feel like a fool!" snarled the Irishman.

"How unreasonable!" deplored Murray. "Have you not been enacting the part of an *Outraged Parent* who sacrificed all in defense of his daughter? My dear *chevalier*, what rôle could you select more heroical?"

"Give over your mummery," protested O'Donnell. "I'll not be made a mock of, sir!"

"Rightly spoken!" cried my great-uncle. "You shall not be, *chevalier*. Peter, good friend, prithee take three steps within the

companionway and there deposit Colonel O'Donnell with decent propriety upon the two limbs Nature intended for his locomotion. Ah! Excellent! Allow me, mistress!"

Peter and I followed the three of them up the dark tunnel of the companionway.

"We are past one danger-mark, Peter," I whispered. "What's to come?"

"Trouble," mumbled Peter.

"Trouble?"

"Ja. To get der treasure, I saidt dot was easy, Bob. But to divide der treasure—dot's trouble. Andt now we got a woman on der ship—andt dot's more trouble."



BEN GUNN and the two negro lackeys ushered the party to their seats. Mistress O'Donnell sank into hers with a weariness that was pathetic. She was quite regardless of her surroundings. 'Twas as if she had become reconciled to whatever misfortune was in store for her. And she did not so much as glance at her father, who sat morosely upon Murray's left hand across the table from her. Peter took his accustomed place at the opposite end, and I sat beside her.

"Let me give you a glass of this *aqua vite*, my lass," said my great-uncle. "'Tis efficacious for fatigue and the migraine. See, I taste it myself. 'Tis quite all right. You, too, *chevalier*? Excellent! Perhaps you will pass the flask to Master Corlaer yonder. You gentlemen should know each other after your recent intimate contact. And Master Ormerod yonder—my nephew. But I believe you and your daughter have had previous acquaintance with him."

O'Donnell muttered something none too civil, but the maid bestirred herself, and her eyes examined me again with the mingling of horror and stupefaction which governed her mood.

"How come you here?" she asked. "You—you—are you also a pirate?"

"I am a captive as surely as yourself," I returned. "Aye, more so."

"A captive!" she exclaimed, her interest fanned alight. "But surely you——"

My great-uncle interrupted her.

"Please, Mistress O'Donnell! Our tale is sufficiently complicated. Let us not make it more difficult to comprehend by confusing it at the beginning with side-issues."

"Gunn!"

"Yessir!"

The steward ducked and scraped.

"Give us whatever food you have prepared, swiftly. And fetch up some wines—port, burgundy, claret, madeira."

"Yessir."

Ben Gunn writhed himself into the companionway. Murray resumed his discourse to the Irish girl.

"First, that there may be no misunderstanding, mistress, 'tis true that I am he who is known as Captain Rip-Rap."

She shrank away from him in a renewed access of terror.

"I have already told you that you have no cause to fear me," he went on gently, "and to prove that to you I will add that I am an outlaw—what is called a pirate, although I detest the word myself—because I am a Jacobite. I believe too I may claim your father as my friend."

He looked inquiringly at O'Donnell. The Irishman drained his glass.

"'Tis true," he assented. "This gentleman is one Andrew Murray, who was out in the '15 and was afterward in trouble in New York Province on the score of intrigues with our friends and the French, Moira. He hath been a good servant to King James."

"But for why will you have been the death of all the poor folk on the *Santissima Trinidad*?" she cried. "And your men will be lifting the treasure that is Spain's, and Spain a safe haven for the exiles the Hanoverian will not suffer to serve their rightful king and dwell in Britain!"

"'Tis regrettable that Spaniards had to die, lass," answered my great-uncle, lowering his voice to a proper depth of emotion. "But I call to your mind that Spain has not helped the Good Cause as she might when there was a bonny chance of fetching the Stuarts home."

"That is God's truth," she admitted with quick passion.

"Therefore," pursued my great-uncle, "some of us have concerted it to seize a portion of Spain's treasure and turn it to the purpose of winning back for King James his crown."

"I am thinking 'tis not overhonest," she said doubtfully.

"You are no more than a lass," rebuked her father, emptying his second glass.

"'Tis not for you to be saying what is honest and what is not honest in politics, of which you have no knowledge."

"Indeed," interposed my great-uncle,

"the question as to what is honest and what is dishonest in politics is one upon which men have been unable to agree since the times of Aristotle."

"Yet even politicians can not honestly confuse the dishonesty of taking one man's gold for another man's profit," I put in.

Mistress O'Donnell gave me a sidewise look.

"We are speaking of kings, not of men," my great-uncle pointed out.

"I am afraid I will be of Master Ormerod's way of thinking," said the Irish maid.

"You talk nonsense, Moira," blustered her father. "Is it not better that this treasure should be employed to recover England and all the lands pertaining to the English Crown for their rightful rulers—who will assist in the restoration of the True Faith—than that it should be poured into the pockets of the king's favorites at Madrid? You are only a child, and 'tis not fitting for you to know all that goes on in the world; yet common sense, ordinary religious devotion and affection for your king might tell you so much. Why, lass, there are great lords, aye, a prince of the Church, no less, that set the seal of their approval to what we do."

Moira O'Donnell hung her head.

"Sure, I am only an ignorant lass as you say, *padre*, one that knows no more than the sisters taught her in the convent; but there's that in me cries out stronger than learning or creed or loyalty."

Colonel O'Donnell hammered his fist upon the table-top—he had just drained a third glass.

"And this is the child of a race that have been pulled down from the high places of the land by the tyrant, and their heads and limbs strewn — knows where and those who escaped death driven to poverty and exile! Girl, you know not what you say. The people of Spain will be thanking us for the use to which we turned their treasure—and then we'll pay it back," he added with a happy inspiration.

"Odds, that we will!" endorsed my great-uncle. "What's a million and a half pounds to royal Spain? Aye, or to an England that waxes grandly prosperous under wise Stuart rule?"

"'Twill be the difference betwixt honor and dishonor," I cried hotly. "As for prosperity, England was never richer, as any man who earns his living honestly would

tell you. King George may be a Dutchman and talk with an accent and spend more time in Hanover than London; but he keeps his hands off trade, and that means wealth for all who'll labor."

Colonel O'Donnell favored me with a fishy glance.

"It seems we must both reckon with disloyalty in our families, Murray," he remarked dryly.

"Never give it a thought, sir," replied my great-uncle. "Tut, tut, *chevalier*, they are young and shall learn by experience. Let them argue it between themselves, eh? That should fetch them around."

"I'll not suffer any to call me disloyal!" exclaimed Moira. "I am all for the Stuarts; but I'd not have them resort to dishonest means to win what is their own."

"Humph," said my great-uncle. "To win their own, my lass, they must have money. If you will tell us where else in the wide world they are to obtain it, I'll transship this treasure back aboard the *Santisima Trinidad*."

She was silent.

His suave manner conveyed subtly an implication of the importance he attached to her approval.

"You see?"

"I would not inflict a dose of the material philosophy of age upon one so young and charming, my dear," he went on; "but possibly you will forgive me if I indicate to you the regrettable circumstance that the ideal is seldom attainable? In other words, mistress, to obtain the greatest good for the greatest number of people it is occasionally necessary to inflict misery, suffering, even death, upon a lesser number. As in the present case, in order to secure the means for re-establishing King James and what your father so quaintly terms the True Faith in the British Isles, it hath been necessary for a gentleman of questionable legal status—myself—associated with others of yet more dubious antecedents and repute, to procure the death of divers Spanish persons, who, of themselves, had never wrought any harm against us or the cause we served."

"Paradoxical, I must admit, involving an apparent denial of the essential elements of divine justice, and in an ordinary light a gross breach of the world's laws and conventions. But 'tis by precisely such contraventions of precedent and lettered laws

that epochal events are brought about. I trust my reasoning is clear?"

"Faith, sir," she answered simply, "I think you will be poking fun at me."

My great-uncle took snuff.

"I was never more serious," he asserted.

O'Donnell emptied a fourth glass with an impatient growl that masked an oath.

"You are wasting time, Murray. Moira is a good lass, and my daughter; but what she thinks of this venture——"

"—is of considerable importance to me," my great-uncle protested. "I was compelled in the beginning of our acquaintance to give her a wrong impression of my character, and I am extremely desirous to have her good opinion."

"You'd better work on your nephew first," the Irishman snapped.

"'Tis to earn his good opinion that I am so solicitous of hers," my extraordinary relative admitted serenely, and the shadow of a smile brightened her face.

"Troth, sir," she retorted, "I am thinking that is the wisest thing you have said, for the young man appears to be the one of you that has a prejudice for the plain truth—I can say nothing for the large gentleman, since he has not opened his mouth."

Murray laughed.

"I will take to myself some of the credit you heap upon my nephew," he said. "As to the 'large gentleman,' 'tis his custom to be silent; eh, Peter?"

"Ja," said Peter.

"But why is he—" she blushed a trifle—"why is Master Ormerod a captive? Why does he say I am a captive, if——"

"You are not a captive," returned my great-uncle. "At least, I say that under the impression that, as your father's daughter and a devout Jacobite, you would not, whatever your personal feelings might be, undertake to interfere with our plans."

He waited, and after a pause she nodded her head.

"My grandnephew on the other hand," he continued, "as well as the 'large gentleman' yonder, are not political sympathizers with us—not yet."

"Nor will they ever be," I corrected him.

"I shall beg leave to differ with you, Robert," he replied. "Nevertheless in justice to you I will go on and acquaint Mistress O'Donnell that I carried you by force aboard my ship, Peter accompanying you

of his own free will, for reasons which sufficiently commended themselves to me."

"I am wondering are you all mad," she said blankly.

"You may well say so!" I exclaimed. "The truth is this, mistress: Master Murray hath besides his own ship's company a second band of pirates the which are restless beneath his thumb. He desired me to be his lieutenant to help him hold them in restraint, and——"

"You restrained them bravely aboard the *Santissima Trinidad*!" she cried. "My faith, but I am caught in a network of lies!"

"Moiral!" gurgled her father, sopping his cuff as he finished his fifth glass. "Ye talk like a—like a—" his brogue thickened—"a besom or what not at all. I'll not have it! I'll not have it, I say!"

"That was to save you!" I declared.

"Troth, and I'm saved," she echoed sarcastically.

"Yes, you and your father," said Murray gravely. "Colonel O'Donnell risked everything on this coup of ours. To protect him 'twas essential it should never be known he was privy to it. We had the choice of two means to that end. One was to sink the *Santissima Trinidad* with all hands except yourselves——"

She cried out in expostulation and clapped her hands to her eyes as if to shut out the vision the words evoked.

"The other," he continued, "was to arrange to remove the two of you in such fashion as to establish your innocence. I am free to say the first was the easiest course. The dictates of humanity, however, prevailed."

How he rolled that last sentence!

"And what do you know of humanity that soaked the decks of the *Santissima Trinidad* with blood?" she answered. "You that the Spaniards cite as a byword for cruelty and wickedness! I will not believe a word that you say. I will not believe any man here. You are all smirched with the same badness."

"Blessed Virgin guard me!" whimpered O'Donnell. "And did any ever hear a daughter tell of her father the like of that? Glad I am the mother that bore ye——"

Peter leaned his great bulk forward upon the table.

"Don't talk no more, you," he commanded the Irishman. "*Neen*, I talk! Little gal, Bob andt I we don't come wit'

Murray because we like to. He makes us. *Ja!* He uses us. He uses your fat'er. He uses you. But when we are wit' him we do what we can to take care of you. It is not goodt for little gals to be on pirate ships. *Neen!*"

He leaned back.

"Dot's all."

Her blue eyes dwelt seriously upon his vast, flat face, with its insignificant features blobbed here and there.

"I believe you," she said.

"Stap me," jeered Murray. "Our Peter is discovered a squire o' dames—a *pricux chevalier*. Peter, you ha' disguised your talents. We must know more of them."

"*Ja*," said Peter vacantly.

Mistress O'Donnell rose from her chair.

"Sir——" she addressed my great-uncle—"you will be excusing me if I do not linger for more conversation. What you do hath no concern with me. I am very distraught, and my heart is sick with the black sorrow, and I—I——" she swayed a little—"I would lie me down and—and—weep."

I slipped from my seat and steadied her. Her father, opposite, blinked at us through maudlin tears.

"A sweet maid!" he hiccuped. "She's all I ha' left from following the Lost Cause. Curse the Hanoverian——"

"Take her to your stateroom, Robert," said my great-uncle. "You must lodge with Peter."

He rose himself, bowing with the fine courtesy which became him nobly.

"What we can do to serve you, dear lass, that will we right gladly. In the mean time do you rest and forget the nightmare scenes I would have spared you had I known how."

I guided her as far as the stateroom door. She thanked me faintly as I opened it for her, and I was abruptly impelled to recover her friendship.

"What I tried to tell you was the truth," I murmured, the words spilling fast from my tongue. "Indeed it was so! Peter Corlaer had the right of it. We two are no pirates, and all that we ha' done has been intended to make smooth your way."

There was a wistful light in her eyes as she lifted them under long, black lashes.

"God send you be honest, sir," she said.

"I—I must wait to judge. The world is gone all twirly-round. Even the *padre*——"

She choked back a sob.

"You will not misunderstand," she ended with quiet dignity, "if I say no more that maybe already ha' said too much."

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEAD MAN'S CHEST

WHEN I returned to the main cabin Ben Gunn was placing the food on the table, and my great-uncle was removing the liquor from Colonel O'Donnell's reach.

"We have had sufficient to drink, Ben," he said and, heedless of the Irishman's disappointed face, waved away that which had been before them as well as the new array of bottles one of the lackeys bore upon a silver tray.

Nothing more was said until the steward and the negroes had retired. Then Murray sat forward in his chair.

"There is a certain matter of importance to be discussed, colonel," he announced. "I must have your attention."

O'Donnell nodded sulkily.

"As you know, the crew of my associate, Captain Flint, some of whom you saw in New York, are not under the same discipline as my own men. Captain Flint saw fit to express jealousy of the terms I arranged with your principals for the division of the treasure, and in order to conciliate him and assure him of my good faith I gave him my grandnephew and Master Corlaer as hostages. They went unwillingly and succeeded in escaping before we sailed, returned aboard the *James* and secreted themselves for several days. I dared not risk the time to return them to Flint, and I anticipate that he will receive me now with augmented suspicion."

"I said all along ye were crazy to let a low fellow like him have any hand in the affair," fumed O'Donnell.

"We need not go over that again," rejoined my great-uncle. "I must have the security of the Rendezvous, and for that I must needs pay Flint. Also, I may have need of him in other ways. This venture is not yet consummated. There is likewise the consideration that we have worked together in the past, and I owe him a modicum of loyalty."

"Loyalty to the Cause should come first," declared O'Donnell.

"True, sir, and I yield it. But I must

look to the future. 'Tis contrary to my policy to break with Flint if it can be avoided. 'Tis similarly contrary to my instinct to trust him farther than I must, and in this immediate case I am loath to trust him."

"What's to do?" rasped O'Donnell. "Raise his price?"

"No, no. My suggestion is that we should stow away our friends' portion of the treasure before we return to the Rendezvous."

"Where?"

"I have been turning that in my mind for several weeks. There is an island south of Porto Rico in the Virgin Group, a barren dot, hated by all seamen for sorry memories of shipwreck and suffering. They call it the Dead Man's Chest."

I remembered the deep, swinging chorus I had first heard in the Whale's Head tavern the night I sought O'Donnell for his daughter. It sounded like a fit place for pirate treasure.

The Irishman frowned.

"What? Dump this gold we have risked so much to win on a sandbar for the first passing fellow to——"

"I have said no man will go there if he can help it."

"I like it not!" scowled O'Donnell. "My friends would have ugly things to say did the stuff slip from our hands in that way."

"'Tis less likely to slip from our hands on the Dead Man's Chest than aboard the *Royal James*," answered Murray. "Be-think you, *chevalier*! To begin with, there is Flint to reckon with. He will be nasty, as nasty as he dares, depending upon the temper of his crew and the quantity of rum he has consumed. Second, there is always the chance that we might fall in with a frigate too swift for us. On all scores 'tis preferable to get the treasure off the *Royal James*. 'Twill give us time to let the hue and cry of the Spaniards die down and to arrange with your friends for its reception in France."

"Whatever you say, 'tis a miserable alternative," protested O'Donnell. "Let us rather hold north and set the treasure ashore in France."

"To run the gauntlet of French and English cruisers?" my great-uncle demanded scornfully. "——'s blood, man, you are out of your mind! And when you had landed it, what would you do? How much of it

would go to your friends and how much to grease the pockets of French officials? A great treasure is not so easily disposed of."

"Ja," spoke up Peter, "dot's right, Murray. But what goodt is it to go back to Flint? He makes trouble, always he makes trouble—andt if he don't, his men does. It's better you go anodder place."

My great-uncle took snuff, tapping the box thoughtfully after he had dusted the powder in his nostrils.

"To be strictly honest with you, gentlemen," he remarked at last, "I am disposed to return to Flint because I foresee a possibility of my desiring to sacrifice him to cover our tracks. I have no definite plan in mind, but a situation might shape itself in which it would be desirable to supply a fugitive for Spaniard, Frenchman and Englishman to chase. I should vastly prefer—as I am sure you would, too—that the fugitive be the *Walrus* and not the *James*. Also, until that situation arises, the Rendezvous is the safest hiding-place I know this side of Africa."

O'Donnell eyed him with involuntary respect.

"I should hate to have ye set on my track, Murray!" he exclaimed. "Is not Flint your friend?"

My great-uncle considered this question.

"Scarcely my friend," he decided. "Say, rather, associate. And the fellow is troublesome occasionally. I should have no hesitation in sacrificing him to secure the stake we play for."

"And there is no real feeling of loyalty in your heart!" I gibed. "'Tis simply a question of using him to your best advantage."

"Yes and no, Robert," he retorted coolly. "As you grow older you will learn that as naught is wholly bad neither is it wholly good."

A step clumped in the companionway, and Martin stuck his grizzled head in the cabin.

"Last o' the ——— ruddy-boys is comin' aboard, sir," he said. "What course will ye set?"

Murray looked to the Irishman.

"Here's the moment for decision, sir," he said. "'Tis for you to say what shall be done."

O'Donnell's long face seemed to grow longer.

"Sure, and how will I know what to say that never gave thought to the matter be-

fore?" he parried dubiously. "Do I understand you to suggest Captain Flint might attempt to possess the entire treasure?"

"I should consider it likely," assented my great-uncle.

"He is more likely to make trouble if you come to the Anchorage after disposing of half the gold," I thrust in. "'Twill only serve to stimulate his suspicions."

"There is reason in what you say," agreed my great-uncle. "Nevertheless, permit me to indicate that if we have not the half of the treasure 'twill be impossible for him to secure it by any means."

O'Donnell smacked his open hand upon the table top.

"A truce to arguing!" he exclaimed. "I am in your hands, Murray, whether it pleases me or not. Do whichever you think best."

My great-uncle turned to the mate.

"Cast loose from the prize, Master Martin, and make all sail. The course is so east by south. I would have you stand off out of sight of the Porto Rican shore."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Martin hesitated.

"And the treasure, cap'n?" he added.

"Ben Gunn will give you the keys of the lazaret. 'Twill go there as usual."

"Aye, aye, sir."



THERE was an interval of silence after he had gone. The shouts of the pirates echoed from the deck, with the creaking of halyards and flapping of sails. The *Royal James* seemed to shake herself as she sidled free of the battered hull of the *Santissima Trinidad*, and through the stern windows showed the bowsprit and fo'c'sle of the Spaniard, still smothered beneath a mess of canvas and broken spars and rigging. Slowly we drew past her, and I was amused to see that men leaned from her ports and on her bulwarks, watching us with the idle curiosity to be expected in any friendly meeting at sea.

The Spanish flag still flaunted at her main where it had stayed throughout the action. Don Ascanio, her captain, still stood with folded arms and furious mien on the poop. The group of religious were all on their knees in prayer. The fat monk raised his crucifix with a threatening gesture as we glided under her stern.

"Observe the fallacy of religious conviction," commented Murray. "The monk

curses us for a crime we have not committed."

"There is enough evil to your credit to warrant him, even so," I answered.

O'Donnell crossed himself.

"Leave religion alone, Murray," he said sourly. "'Tis a bid for ill-fortune to mock the Church and holy men and women."

"Prejudice, my dear *chevalier*!" protested my great-uncle. "Yet any sane view of mundane affairs must recognize religion hath its uses to mankind."

He rose.

"If you will pardon me, I have much to see to on deck. Should you desire any refreshment do but ring that bell and state your wants to the steward. Robert, if you and Peter can so far submerge your Hanoverian sympathies I should appreciate such aid as you might render in the accounting of the treasure."

Peter and I went with him, as much to escape the company of the Irishman as to satisfy our curiosity regarding the chests and boxes we had glimpsed in transit across the *Santissima Trinidad's* deck. And certes, the scene that awaited us was worth going far to see. The maindeck, immediately for'ard of the poop, was jammed with the contents of the Spaniard's lazaret, piled helter-skelter as the working-parties had hastily shifted it from one ship to the other.

Murray produced tablet and ink-horn; a desk was arranged for me atop of a water-butt, and one by one a procession of pirates filed past, each with his load of gold or silver, minted and in bullion.

'Twas a marvelous concentration of wealth. The columns of figures I set down upon the tablet never condescended to detail—5,000 pieces of eight, they would run, or 10,000 doubloons, 12,000 onzas, 20,000 castellanos, 25,000 eights, and so on. One cask we opened was filled with quaint Eastern coins, some square, some oblong, some cubical, some round, inscribed with spider-like characters, a consignment from the Spanish possessions in the South Seas. There was upward of two hundred thousand pounds in bar silver, fifty-pound ingots sheathed by threes in thick canvas jackets to facilitate their transport by mule-trains—each mule carrying a load of three hundred pounds. There was a quantity, too, of gold bullion, each ingot of eighty pounds in its own canvas jacket. There were a chest of

precious stones, the value of which we could only guess at, and three chests of plate.

The total value, by the Government estimates upon each package, chest or keg, was £1,563,995 in English money, exclusive of the jewels and the plate; and we did not conclude the accounting and bestowal of the treasure in Ben Gunn's wine-cellar until an hour past dusk, when Murray dismissed all hands with an extra ration of rum and instructed Saunders, who had the watch, to allow his men to sleep on deck, except those actually needed for lookouts and the wheel.

In the cabin we found Colonel O'Donnell asleep, sprawled on the table with his head rested on his folded arms, a puddle of wine by his elbow. My great-uncle's eyebrows twitched upward.

"This gentleman is a chamberlain to King James, Robert," he remarked, "a Knight of Malta and of Santiago in Spain, a colonel of Spanish engineers and lord of I know not how many bog-manors in Ireland if he had his rights. And look at, him!"

He was not a pleasant sight, I'll own; but my redoubtable relative's perpetual air of omniscience grated upon me.

"Who brought him to this?" I retorted.

"Not I, my boy! To intrigue is not necessarily to license appetite. Well, well, 'tis doubly fortunate I induced him to fetch along the little maid."

"'Twas well nigh your most dastardly act!"

He took snuff, deliberately pondering the charge, and despite the toil of the day his face preserved its uncanny fulness of outline.

"The appearances are against me," he answered. "Yet I am inclined to believe that in the long run you will concede I acted for the best. Consider her plight in a Spanish convent, if anything happened to her father."

"Consider her plight in a pirate ship, if anything happened to him!" I jeered.

He appealed to Peter, whimsically humorous.

"Stap me, the boy wears upon my nerves! Was ever a youth so callow in his assurance of righteousness?"

Peter's little eyes twinkled.

"He is right, andt you are right. But we better put der colonel in his bed, *ja*."

"'A Daniel come to judgment!'" cried Murray. "Now what might you mean by that, friend Peter?"

"You know what I mean—andt I know what you mean," returned the Dutchman solemnly. "You are a big rascal, but dot time maybe you was right."

"Don't be an idiot, Peter," I rasped.

"'Tis you are the idiot," affirmed my great-uncle. "Here are you and Peter—two honest men if any ever were—and myself, with less claim to virtue perhaps, but as acute an interest, if the truth be known. And all three of us a-hungering to safeguard the lass. What mother might ask more?"

"And Flint," I amended. "He'd protect her, I suppose."

"He'll never have the chance, Robert," he answered gravely. "You and Peter have played ducks and drakes, between you, with my plans; but John Flint is not the man to overreach me. Give him rope, lad—and we'll present him his chance to hang."

"Ja," said Peter. "We take care of der little gal—andt so we put der colonel in his bed."

And so we did, to an accompaniment of stammered oaths and tags of Jacobite ditties.

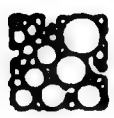
Afterward, in Peter's stateroom, I asked him what he had been hinting at in his exchange with Murray.

"Oh, we just talk," he replied, rolling into his berth with a ponderous sigh of satisfaction.

"I heard you," I snapped. "But of what?"

There was a dim light in his eyes, buried behind rolling flaps of blubber.

"We just talk," he murmured. "Murray talks, andt I talk. Murray, he likes to talk, ja."

 I WAS up early in the morning, but Mistress O'Donnell and my great-uncle were before me. As I climbed to the poop I saw them standing by the weather rail, Murray expressing deference in every line of his straight figure and handsome, old-young face, the little maid eying him with a comical mixture of antipathy and respect.

The wind had veered in the night, providentially for us, and we were running free, the *James* riding the easy swell with the dash of a race-horse. We were out of sight of land.

My great-uncle clapped his hand on my shoulder in his best paternal manner, and

Mistress O'Donnell gave me a shy look that I read to reflect a double attitude of mind similar to that she evidenced for him.

"Here is my nephew who will settle all your remaining doubts, Mistress Moira," proclaimed Murray; "and with your leave I'll be about my morning inspection—for we must maintain a high level of discipline, since we sail on the king's errand and are therefore the king's ship."

She watched his retreating back with a kind of fascination.

"Sure, I never met the like of him," she said at last. "He puts me in mind of the grand gentry the *padre* brings to see me in Madrid—and him a pirate! Glory, what a tale I could be telling the girls if I ever see the four walls of St. Bridget's again! Whiles I talk with him he makes me feel there's none other so grand and fine in the broad world. And again I'll remember the screaming on the *Santissima Trinidad* and what Frey Sebastian said of him—and then the shivers turn me winter-cold. But I'm thinking yourself will be the same queer sort, Master Ormerod, you that can be generous and gallant to a foolish maid and as cruel as the wildcat the Indians showed us in the hills up behind Porto Bello."

"It must seem so to you," I answered. "But the truth is that I am as much the sport of Fate as yourself."

"Do you tell me so?" she replied politely.

"I do," I said with energy. "Let me tell you the whole story—it begins on the night I accompanied you to the Whale's Head—"

"Ah, that was a night of nights!" she exclaimed. "The first breath of adventure ever I drew, and I was thinking to myself as I hugged the memory afterwards I could never get enough of that same savor. But yesterday was the curing of my hunger."

And her blue eyes clouded with tears and the corners of her mouth quirked downward most dolefully.

"Do but let me tell you my story," I pleaded, "and you will think better of that night and maybe of some things that happened afterward."

"Why, sir," she said, "here are you with a ready tongue, and me with two ears wide open. There's naught to stop you. But as to believing—that will be a story for me to tell and you to hear."

So I began at the beginning and told her

all from the moment Darby McGraw had run into the counting-room in Pearl Street—and how remote in time and place that seemed as we stared out upon the blue-green rollers of the Caribbean and the tropic sun warmed toward its noon intensity! She listened with mounting interest, never interrupting save for an occasional "Glory!" "Oh, blessed saints!" "Holy Virgin, can such things be!" But when I came to the escape from the *Walrus* she broke in upon me.

"And you did that to be handy by if I had need of you! Oh, sir, forget the wicked suspicions I owned! 'Tis a true friend you will be—and the large gentleman, too. What is he called? Master Corlaer? Alas, I am heavy in your debt, and always shall be. But the only payment I ever can make will be just my bare thanks and the prayers I'll say on my bended knees my life long."

She was wholly trustful with Peter and me from then on and spent most of her time with us. Her father, when he was not drinking, was engaged in conferences with Murray. They worked for hours at a time with quill and paper, figuring the strength of clans, costs of muskets and powder and lead and the number of field-cannon to be stowed in a ship's hold, as also the individual requirements of chiefs and nobles and the amounts for which several persons would "sell out." And as they worked my great-uncle's confidence increased, and Colonel O'Donnell's long, horsy face took on a flush over the cheekbones that was not alone the result of four bottles of madeira at a sitting.

On the seventh morning after the action with the *Santissima Trinidad* we raised a low, sandy islet, densely choked with low trees and bush growth, bare of any characteristic that invited human habitation. Its only distinguishing feature was its roughly oblong shape, which might, by a stretch of imagination, enable it to be likened to a sailor's chest. Murray approached it with caution, a man in the chains dipping the lead continually, and we came to anchor under its lee and a mile or more offshore.

In the mean time Martin and a party of some fifty men had been passing up treasure from the wine-cellar or lazaret, the mate checking the amounts withdrawn upon the list I had prepared, the pirates muttering amongst themselves in a way not at all to

my fancy as they gaged anew the size of the fortune they had won without so far any benefit or reward. Martin was a competent officer, and he kept them at work, for all their grumbling and discontent, until the anchor cable ran out and Murray issued an order to lower all the small boats. The next thing we knew the fifty had hurled the mate into the scuppers and were swarming up the starboard poop ladder, a giant North-countryman at their head.

Murray, who had been talking with O'Donnell, leaped to meet them, as unperturbed as if the incident were a part of the ship's routine.

"Get back there, men," he ordered quietly.

The leaders halted, sullenly irresolute, cowed at once by the red glare in his tawny eyes, the cold power that radiated from his white face.

"We'm on'y seekin' a bit goold," said the first man hoarsely.

My great-uncle calmly produced a small, double-barreled French pistolet from an inner pocket, shot the fellow in the head, leaned forward and pushed his body off the ladder.

"Master Martin," he called, "be so good as to have that carrion cast overboard. Go about your work, men, or I'll flog the lot of you at the triangles."

They tumbled down the ladder and disintegrated like a pack of sheep, and not one raised a hand when Martin came at them, cursing grotesquely in his gentle voice and striking right and left with knotted fists. Two of them obeyed his order to throw the dead man's body over the rail, and they went straight to the boat-falls without another mutinous word or act.

Yet when Murray turned to face us I noted the tiny wrinkle betwixt his eyebrows which was a sure indication that he was worried.

Moirá O'Donnell, who had been standing with Peter and me, listening to my recital of the song about the island, was the first to speak.

"Will you have had to shoot that man?" she challenged.

"'Twas that or maybe the deaths of all of us, my lass," he replied, unwontedly grim. "A shipload of men like my crew are a volcano of lawlessness held in restraint by fear. Let them once break the spell of discipline—which is maintained by fear—and

they in their numbers would soon overpower us. This incident is relatively unimportant, but it points a lesson I should be reckless not to heed.

"To be brief, my friends," my great-uncle, summed up, "I dare not leave the *Royal James* whilst any of the treasure is aboard; nor would it be safe for me to entrust any of my crew with the location of the hiding-place."

He took snuff, staring contemplatively at the sand-hillocks of the Dead Man's Chest.

"Here then is my plan," he pursued. "I will have eight hundred thousand pounds set ashore in the boats—my own share of one hundred thousand, *chevalier*, as well as the seven hundred thousand pounds guaranteed to your friends. I will then land you four, with sufficient provisions, and bear away in the *James* to the so'th'ard, returning in five days to pick you up. In the intervening period you should be able to transport the treasure to a safe spot and bury it. In that way, *chevalier*, its safety can be assured until we are able to return for it with the *James* or some other craft dispatched by your friends."

"Your plan is maybe the best in the circumstances," answered O'Donnell, "but I'd have ye remember, Murray, that of the four people who will know of the gold's location two are Hanoverians and the third is my daughter, who is a weak maid."

My great-uncle laughed.

"You need have no fear on the score of those three. You little know Mistress Moira if you call her a weak maid; and as for Robert and Peter, they are men of honor—and best of all, are not likely to be submitted to the temptation to reveal the treasure to their political friends. No, no, colonel; by my plan the treasure will be safer than in a bank."

There was more talk back and forth, but the end of it all was that O'Donnell accepted my great-uncle's plan, and Moira was won over likewise by the argument that so long as the treasure was stolen it had best be assured to a worthy purpose. Peter and I agreed for a complex of reasons—because of the little maid for one thing, and for another, because there was an excitement in the burial of treasure which neither of us had tasted before, and also, of course, be-

cause, when all was said and done, we were prisoners and we must. But I'd never seek to deny that we had pleasure from the thrill that came to us late in the afternoon of that day as we stood on the narrow beach of the islet beside a great stack of kegs and chests, axes, pickaxes and shovels, a barrel of water and boxes of food from Ben Gunn's larder, watching the boat that had landed us pull back to the *James*.

The ensuing three days demanded an amount of manual labor which extracted wails of indignation from Colonel O'Donnell, much uncomplaining effort from Moira and all the strength Peter and I possessed. Indeed, without the big Dutchman we might never transported that amount of treasure, dug a hole for it and concealed the location, all within the time-limit Murray had allowed us.

The first afternoon and evening we spent in selecting a hiding-place in a shallow valley protected from the terrible storms which sweep those seas. Colonel O'Donnell and Moira were detailed to do the digging, as neither was as capable as Peter and I of managing the weighty bulk of the casks and chests. And after that we worked unremittingly, except for a couple of hours at midday and a short snatch of sleep about dawn; for the starlit nights, with their bracing sea-winds, were the most comfortable times we had. Yet the tops'ls of the *James* were within sight before we had disposed of the last spadeful of sand from the hiding-place and replanted its area with the trees and bushes we had removed with every care to preserve their roots.

Her father had an unconquerable aversion to laboring with his hands, but his engineering knowledge enabled him to survey crudely the site we used and plot certain angles which fixed it in our memories—a precaution highly necessary, as when we had finished there was no more evidence of what we had done than a slight instability about several trees. We had even gone so far as to transplant an enterprising colony of land-crabs to scuttle back and forth over the fresh-turned sand. And in a month, we knew, the luxuriant growth would have obliterated the narrow slash of the path that zigzagged across the sand hillocks to the valley's lip.

TO BE CONTINUED



The SNOW TRAIL by F. ST. MARS

Author of "The Edged Tool," "The Highwayman of the Marsh," etc.

NO COMPANY, no Christmas, seems to be the case in the wild as everywhere else. Possibly the pine-marten—the long, low, lean beast, with the clean-wedged head of a fighter, the beautiful chocolate, shiny coat, and the orange-yellow shirt-front, with the idiotically short legs, the miniature bear-paws, the wide "prick" ears, the bushy tail—was not aware that it was Christmas. Yet he was distinctly and suddenly aware that he was alone, and that he hated that loneliness with a fierce hatred.

This was specially strange, because he always had been alone. Fate had decreed that he, one of the most playful beasts and one of the liveliest, should never associate with his kind since the day when, as a weaned cub, he had seen his father leap a very fine somersault with a rifle-bullet in his heart, and the night when he had stood by and listened to the agony of his mother's scream in a trap. They accentuated his loneliness.

Never once in all those years had he crossed the trail of another pine-marten. If he had, he would have followed it through anything. Of course, he had always the company of the other wild folks. But what were they? Two-thirds of them feared and hated him. The other third hated and tried to make him fear them. But he was not given to fearing anything very much, and, in spite of all, remained an outcast, an outlaw, with irrepressible spirit and unquenchable heart, but alone, always alone and apparently happy.

Tonight, however, he was by no manner of means happy. So an hour before his usual wary time he got up from his warm Winter nest, stuck his sharp wet muzzle into the frost, and stared at the blue-gray haze gathering between the iron-hard tree-trunks above the spotless snow-carpet a-down the silent wooded aisles.

As he did so the invisible knives which men called the northeast wind wafted to his quick, wide, cream-fringed ears the far-away ringing of bells, church bells, pure as silver, and very wonderful in that setting. Martes listened to them for a half-minute, for he always wanted to know about everything, and then he hurried along—and he moved with a rippling glide which was grace personified—to drink, being a thirsty soul and living upon thirsty fare.

Leaping when the snow was too deep, rippling along when it wasn't, making of himself a living observation-tower by sitting on his hind-legs whenever the snow threw him at fault, he arrived at a spring, a mere hole under bending tree-trunks. This spring he encircled twice before approaching—you learn to do such things if you have a price upon your head.

Then Martes drank much and quickly, eyes and ears and nose hard at work, for drinking is a risky job in the wild sometimes.

Having finished, he drew back a few paces, and, running at the pool, landed his two strong forefeet in the water with a pounce, as if he were pouncing upon a bird, making the water spurt and spray up in

jets all around him. This he did four times, not at his own reflection but for play. He liked to see the water fly. He was that kind of beast. Life for him was more than just existence by the skin of his teeth, it was LIFE! No crawling through the years with his tail between his legs for him!

Then suddenly he had spun—no, whizzed—on his heels, and in a twinkling was up a tree. Then down again—tobogganing down. Up another tree he raced, and then into the next—a clean flying leap that. And so the game went on. I can never make you understand the lightning, the dazzling speed of it all. And then—with one headlong, scraping dive, he had tobogganed to the bottom of a tree and was standing motionless on the snow, breathing hard, but otherwise as calm as if nothing had happened.

What a beast!

And that was just play, too. It had all been play, and, in the process of play, training—keeping fit. Fitness with him was as essential as life itself. It was life itself, indeed, and without it he would starve.

Suddenly Martes drew one rippling streak across the snow, and another up the trunk of a snow-draped pine. There seemed to be no reason for such an act of violent speed, till one became aware, dimly 'tis true, for the pace of both the figures was fairly dizzy, of a red streak, also rippling, going up the tree in front of him.

Martes must have seen it move, up there among the branches. Probably he had disturbed it by his mad frolics. Anyhow, trust Martes to know a squirrel when he saw one!

What followed was distinctly hazy. The squirrel shot out from the extreme tip-top of the tree, and sailed down, umbrella fashion. Next instant Martes, with his tail doing the balancing wonderfully, also shot out into mid-air as if fired from a catapult. One had a glimpse—truly it was no more—of the squirrel, flattened like a blown leaf on a wet window against the trunk of the tree he had “flown” to one moment, and the bare half of a glimpse of Martes touching that same tree-trunk, and rebounding again, even as the squirrel leaped, instantly after. The whirligig followed, giving a hazy notion of a spinning corkscrew—red and chocolate—going up another tree, and of a quivering line—also red and chocolate—shooting—tobogganing it was really—

down that tree's neighbor, from topmost twig to snow-buried root.

Then it appeared as if a big hanging bough had acted as a chute for two objects, which hurtled down its entire length, head first, in a little avalanche of snow. Both hit the white carpet beneath together, or nearly so. Then there was one wild red-and-chocolate wheel that spun so fast upon the spotless carpet that it looked like a blur; and then there was Martes, standing low and still above the kicking squirrel, whom he held by the back of the neck. Now you know why, like a prize-fighter, Martes had to keep fit, don't you? He wouldn't have been able to make a living long off these winged-footed tree gentry if he did not.

The squirrel did not kick long. One clean, scientific thrust of Martes' glistening stiletto canines through the soft tissue at the back of the head did the trick and relieved the squirrel of all pain for ever.

Our Martes did not stay with that squirrel long. He took what he wanted—blood—and then remembered once more that he *must* find company, or bust. If he failed—well, one felt sorry for the wild folk of those lonely wooded heights if he failed this time.

It is a peculiar habit of the weasel tribe—to which Martes belonged, and was nearly king—that you can almost to a certainty tell where they will travel, also that they *will* travel, they being the most restless of beasts. And both habits have cost them something before now.

Martes' link-like trail led through the wood, along the bank of a frozen stream just as the wan dusk was beginning to fall. At one spot a tree had fallen, or been felled, across that stream, and he must make of it a bridge to—to see what was on the other side, presumably.

At another place he nearly ran against something coming round the corner of the tree-trunk as softly as a wood-wraith.



BOTH beasts snapped to motionless rigidity, as if at the touch of some magic wand. Also both beasts snarled. If the one had not been so swift and sudden, and the other so stealthy and silent, they could not have come face to face in that disconcerting fashion.

The other beast was a wild-cat, green-eyed, club-tailed, fierce in aspect beyond the ferocity of any living thing in all the

wild, yet, in reality, just one big, highly-strung lump of bluff.

The two regarded one another, eye to eye, for about as long as a man takes to draw a deep breath, and the pine-marten found no reassurance from what he saw in the inscrutable brain-windows of the cat.

Often in his life he had fought for himself: tonight the idea gave Martes repugnance. He wanted to fight for another. Besides, this was not the kind of company that he wanted.

He leaped—sheer from where he stood, without any preliminary gathering of his limbs—straight for the tree he had just come out of, and the wild-cat's bared claws went *whoop-whoop* half an inch under his tucked-up hind legs.

Then two things happened at once. Martes saw them happen out of the corner of his back-turned eye, and heard out of his back-turned flattened ears; and what he saw, and more especially what he heard, caused him to continue his leaping, not only from branch to branch, but from tree to tree, right on, until he had left that accursed wood where danger of all kinds lurked.

A branch, bent to breaking point under its snowy load, had chosen that moment to decant a huge lump of flying white snow smack bang upon the spot where he had been. Only, this lump of snow was not alone. There were two big, white, spread lumps, which had fallen, flying, upon the spot he left, and one of them was *not* snow, though it had dropped with the snow. It was the white ghost with the "spot-light" eyes.

Martes ought to have waited to thank the wild-cat for making him jump at the psychological moment. He did not. From the diabolical yell that he heard, followed by a scream of pure, unadulterated fiendishness, that wild-cat was quite too busy with the ghost to bother about thanks from any mere pine-marten. And, besides, it was there that Martes struck the trail.

He halted as if he had been shot stone dead. He shivered from head to heels in his tracks where he stood, with one sturdy fore-paw upraised, suspended 'twixt rise and fall. But it was not with cold that he shivered. It was with excitement, such excitement as he had never known in all his life before, and would probably never know again. For the first time since he was a

barely-weaned cub, with the last white hairs of his white baby coat still showing through his new gray one, he had struck the trail of his own kind.

And then he yawned, deliberately, slowly, widely. It was characteristic of him, that yawn. He did it awakening from peaceful sleep; he did it facing terrible death.

Then, with a fling of his bushy tail, a side-long kick out of his flat heels, he settled down to the trailing—such a trailing as there never was, and those austere hills had never seen before. And the bells, far, far away in the valley, rang out as if in triumph to announce the fact. Martes had found his trail at last.

One of the most remarkable things in the wild is the trailing capacity of the weasel tribe—and Martes, as I have told you, was one of the weasel tribe. Rabbits, hares, and many others will tell you all about the awful dumb, dogged perseverance that characterizes the trailing of the great weasel tribe.

From the moment when he first struck the trail Martes followed it as he had never trailed before in all his existence, and—he trailed with his life for sale. That which stopped him now would have to stop him dead.

The trail—it was plain to see on the smooth snow in the light of a frozen, staring moon—headed more or less straight, down-hill, toward the valleys, toward shelter and civilization. All the wild was heading toward the valleys, for all the wild was besieged by snow, starving and dying of cold. A massacre was taking place that night, one of those great and terrible massacres in which Nature sometimes indulges, and for which a whole long Summer cannot make up—King Cold was the executioner.

The long, low pine-marten—undulating along, a grim black figure over the white—passed, it seemed to him, all the wild, heading all one way.

Now a straggling herd of supercilious red deer crossed his path, proudly stepping, the big stag—wise beast—bringing up the rear, and scattered, or struck at him, as he raced through them; now a fox whipped about, with tail straight out like a pointer-dog, and regarded him with a snarling grin, wondering if he were mad; now a roebuck, graceful as some elfin shape of the woods, danced before him in the moonlight, and

made pretty play with his antlers in a pretense at charging.

Once, just on the edge of a lonely farmyard, which the trail had encircled twice, Martes found himself suddenly looking into the horrible, green, glassy orbs, with a light behind them of a dog. Instantly the pine-marten began his extraordinary little war-dance, bristling the while, backward and forward, always with the odd back-fling at the end of it. The dog was starving, and would have had his throat at once if it had not been for that amazing war-dance. It was something quite new to him, and animals loathe what they cannot understand—especially the back somersault. He seemed to expect some trap, some deadly trick in it. At last, however, he seemed to think that death via Martes was less certain than death via starvation, and, heralded by a horrible, worrying snarl he closed.

Martes, however, let him by—jumped, light as a snow-flurry, he did—and buried his fangs in the canine, bony back. The dog wrenched round with a howl, and Martes, dodging easily the clash of those wet fangs, sunk his canines into his opponent's throat. For ten brief, furious seconds the pair whirled in a whirl of powdered snow before they parted; the dog going one way, bleeding, and making horrible noises; Martes going the other way, along the trail, of course, with red eyes and a redder flank where the dog's teeth had not missed.

The trail had hugged the edges of the woods—checking at every windfall, examining every hole. Now it hugged the hedges. Once it showed confusion, and stopped at a dead rabbit; once it went up a tree, and Martes brought a dead pheasant down with it.

Then the trail took Martes to a farmyard. At any other time Martes would have been suspicious of that place because of the absence of wild life around it. As it was, he discovered a dead fowl muddled up with the trail outside the fowl-house—there were two more dead fowls inside—and the rifle-shot charge which was meant for the slayer of those fowls—the maker of the trail—nearly took off the end of Martes' beautiful tail. Certainly there was trouble as well as death on that trail.

Finally, and quite suddenly, it dropped him into the snow-clogged lane at the end of the village, and up to the lich-gate of the churchyard.

There were lights in the windows of the church, and the flame threw beautiful colored reflections upon the snow; and an organ was speaking grandly, deep down in its own bosom.

But Martes had eyes and ears for none of these things. He was momentarily transfixed, hypnotised by that which he saw before him.

A long, rippling shape was moving slowly and silently as if drawn by ropes, up the church-path toward the light and the wonderful music. And a little distance behind an immense ghostly shape, vast-winged, swathed and swathed in piles of white feathers was gliding after it. •

Martes appeared to catch his breath. His blood seemed to stop moving.

It was the ghost bird of the woods. For all he knew, it had been trailing the trail all along, just ahead of him and just as surely as himself.

The seconds seemed to stand still. Even the moon—all the night—appeared to pause.

In another moment that ghost thing, which was a snowy owl of the Arctic, would pounce upon that long, dark thing, and all Martes' trailing, all the years, all his life, would be for nothing. For the dark beast was a female pine-marten—and Martes knew it.

But that moment never fell. Martes just took one yawn, then began. Till that moment one felt one had not known Martes.

*Mark my footsteps well, my page,
Tread thou in them boldly.
Thou shalt feel the Winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.*

The carol came from the church in wondrous chorus, and a raging, icy gust went hissing and rioting among the clipped cedars as Martes—treading verily in the tracks of the female marten—went in at the lich-gate, and up the church-path, to the accompaniment of his still more odd, half-chuckling, half-crooning war-chant—

“Vut-vut-vut-vut!”

The ghost of the North heard it and pivoted in mid-air, while the lady marten pivoted upon her hind-legs, as if she had been stuck with a pin.

They were both just in time to see Martes, in the soft light thrown from the windows upon the snow, fling his back somersault at the end of his war-dance. Then, like a flash

of light, he darted in to fighting range, and the battle had begun.

It seemed that the giant white owl leapt upward in the air even as Martes' dark torpedo form came shooting through the air at him. An awful scream announced that the forces were engaged, and then, still in the air, Martes hanging by his fangs alone, the battle removed itself into the lane.

What happened there and then in that lane no man or woman will ever know.

The female marten remained rooted in her tracks like a beast turned to stone. She could hear the most diabolical yells as if tormented fiends were in mortal combat there, and still more terrifying shufflings, and Martes' fiendish rage-chatter breaking out through it all. There followed one awful, furious scrimmage and—silence.

Seconds, it may have been, or minutes, that that female personification of the wild stood there—fascinated. I know not how

long it was; nor does she. Only this I know, that at the end of that time she became aware of a low, dark red figure, with eyes a-flame, stumbling drunkenly as it came, blundering in at the lich-gate, and up the church-path—*on her trail still*—toward her.

It was Martes.

"Vut-vut-vut!" she crooned, almost like a mother beast to her young, and she took a step toward him. Martes lurched almost into her and she licked his trim, neat, blood-stained head.



PERHAPS it was the bells that frightened them. Perhaps—but, I know not. The trailing was at an end—nothing mattered after that. When a minute or two later the people came trooping out of church into the snowy night, they saw nothing, guessed nothing, heard nothing. The wild had taken back its own again, and the goal of two lives was won at last.

GIPSY LAW

by George Gatlin

GIPSIES of the old order, "deep" Gipsies, the *tatcho Romanos* who become fewer each passing generation, lament the fact that Gipsy law no longer binds their people.

Said old Adam Cooper, an English Gipsy of the old school:

"*Romany Chals* ain't like they used to be. They ain't got no principle, they'd *chore*—steal—from each other, lie amongst themselves, and live in a house and say they was *Gorgios*—non-Gipsies."

True, Mr. Cooper, the old law is no longer enforced, but you know as well as any one that its some-time enforcement is not without a present effect. There is sufficient evidence of this even among the *didikai*, the half-breed, and those who have only a little of the sacred black blood.

There were three major provisions of Gipsy Law. These enjoined fidelity to the *Romany* race and loyalty to Gipsyism; faithfulness in love and marriage; and the payment of debts and fulfilling of obligations. The condition of indebtedness was

known as *pazorrhus*. For certain offenses there were definite punishments, and for others the punishments were determined by the tribe or clan. Sometimes it was social ostracism, expulsion from Gipsy society. Again, if old tales be true, it was death somewhere on a lonely road. For failure to pay just debts it was not uncommon to deliver the debtor to his creditor and force him to work as a slave for a definite period of time. The law was stern. As a rule, those who violated it bowed to the inevitable like true Gipsies.

Gipsy law is no longer enforced, but it is neither dead nor forgotten. Gipsies talk of it in hushed voices and reverently. The old fellows sigh for the old days, regret that they are no longer the same; yet before they finish prove themselves "as Gipsy as the ribs of God." There is not a more clan-nish people. To their own blood they are hospitable, generous, loyal. In love and marriage they are faithful. And among brothers they fear *pazorrhus* even now.

On the STAGE ROAD

by

CHARLES E.
BARNES



PETE SAUNDERS' reputation as the best driver on the stage road was well deserved. That he was also the most popular was due, not so much to his skill in handling the ribbons as to the fact that he was an inveterate gossip. From Ashville on the railway to the gold fields in the north meant four days of choking, smothering dust varied only by intervals of painful progress through bottomless mud. There never seemed to be anything between the two extremes. No one was ever foolish enough to select the journey for a pleasure trip, but the weekly stage was well patronized by those to whom the road was a necessary means to an end. When Saunders was the driver there was always a keen rivalry for the box seat, for the fortunate passenger who secured the place by Pete's side was sure of entertainment to beguile many weary, dusty hours.

Pete knew every man, woman and child on the three hundred miles of road, intimately it would appear, for he could furnish every detail of their history, habits and opinions, and if some of the information he volunteered was hard to believe it was at least very entertaining.

While Pete was always ready to impart information, and needed no urging, he possessed an unusual amount of curiosity and expected a certain amount of response from his temporary seat-mate and, if information was not volunteered, it was a reticent man indeed who could evade his clever cross-examination. Seldom did Pete reach the end of the first day's journey without

sizing up his passenger to his own satisfaction.

But he had met his match in the little man of uncertain age who had now ridden at his side a whole day, had listened with evident pleasure to his tales, asked innumerable questions, answered every one put to him by the curious driver, and yet, as Pete grumbled to his friend the bartender at Red Gulch when they stopped for the night:

"I can't make nothin' out o' the old geezer. To listen to his talk yuh'd say he wuz an innocent old farmer who'd never seen nothin' more excitin' than a Sunday school, an when he looks at yuh with them baby eyes y've a sneakin' feelin' he's nothin' but a kid wearin' a man's beard. Yuh kin ast him a hundred questions an' he'll answer every time an, doggone it, yuh won't know any more'n yuh did before yuh begun."

"It beats —, don't it, how tight some men be," the bartender remarked with sympathy.

"The funny thing about 'im," Pete continued, "is that Bill Hawes—you know the chief constable an' what kind of a sport he is—got no use for anythin' that ain't the real goods— 'Well! He comes to me the night before I left Ashville an' says to stop at his house in the mornin' for a passenger, an' he wants him to have the box seat; an' then he says:

"'You'll like him, Pete. If yuh pick him up on the down trip when you've got gold aboard, an' there's any trouble, just watch him. He's a wonder.'"

"Natchelly next mornin' I reckons to

pick up a man o' size lookin' wicked enough to scare the life out o' Kinney's whole gang, an' when I sees this little runt, an' Hawes shakin' his hand an' slappin' him on the back like they was two of a kind, I was that flabbergasted I lost a fresh cigar I'd just stuck in my teeth."

"Mebbe Hawes is puttin' up a joke on yuh," suggested the bartender while he refilled Pete's glass.

"Joke ——!" Pete replied with scorn. "Bill wouldn't know a joke if it was served to him three times a day. I'm guessin'," he continued in a lower voice, "he's one of them detective chaps up here on some job fer Hawes."

"That might be a good bet too," the bartender agreed.



NOON the next day found Pete no further advanced in his knowledge of the stranger. He accepted his defeat with his usual good-nature and fell back on the pleasure of imparting information.

"There ain't much to see on the road this time o' year," he admitted as the road stretched out in front of them through a wilderness of stunted jack-pine, "but you'd orter see it a month from now when the miners begin to come out. Soon as it starts to freeze, them as've cleaned up a pile come down the road —— bent to spend it 'an there's somethin' doin' every minit."

"That must be interestin'," the stranger replied. "Where do they spend it?"

"Some of 'em—th' old hands—gits as fur as the coast. Some stops at Ashville, but most of 'em never gits past Jake Hansen's."

"Who's Jake Hansen?"

"Never heard o' Jake? He's the king o' the road. Owns the biggest hotel an' the swellest bar this side the coast. It's a dandy— We stop there tonight an' yuh kin see for yerself. Long's yuh keep sober yuh kin drink the best whisky in the country at his bar, but if you're drunk some folks say the stuff he hands out'd poison a rattlesnake."

"How interestin'," his passenger remarked when Pete paused to straighten out his leaders for a curve. "An' the gold miners winter there?"

"——! No!" Pete replied. "When Jake gits through with 'em they goes into the bush to earn grub. It's expensive stoppin' with Jake. That's not sayin' he don't

treat 'em well 's long 's the money lasts. Somethin' doin' all the time. A poker game goin' night an' day. I wouldn't say anythin' where Jake could hear, but you're a stranger an' I'll tip yuh a warnin'. If yuh ever sets into a game with Jake an' his pals, watch yerself, an' if they leaves yuh any money, keep sober. It's darn funny how nobody ever gits away from Jake's with any money. If they don't drop it at poker they always git drunk an' gits rolled, but nobody can't put it on to Jake—he's too blamed clever."

"An' don't nobody make any trouble?" asked the passenger, his innocent eyes full of shocked wonder.

"I tell yuh nobody can't prove nothin'," said Pete. "Besides it'd take nerve to look fer trouble with Jake. He's an ugly customer to tackle. Nobody's got away with it yet, an' nobody's tried it more'n once. Yuh'll see tonight—Jake's been dandyin' up his bar, gittin' ready fer the rush, an' is givin' a house-warmin'. Likely there'll be a big crowd an' plenty o' free licker an' that means——broke loose before mornin'."

Pete continued to entertain his passenger with tales of things that had happened at this notorious stopping-place, each more lurid than the last, and when he pulled up in front of "Hansen's Palace Hotel" he felt he had done his full duty in warning this innocent looking stranger for whom he felt some degree of responsibility.



IF MEASURED by noise and the amount of liquor consumed the house-warming was a great success. Jake Hansen, big, burly and always smiling, knew his crowd which was made up of the entire male population of the country within a radius of many miles. Cowboys from the ranges, freighters from the road, bush-ranchers who had hiked over miles of rough trail attracted by the lure of free whisky, with a sprinkling of half-breeds and Indians from the reservation. It was not long before the spirits consumed at the bar began to find vent in hilarious horse-play, and when Hansen gave the signal for the music, supplied by a shock-headed youth with a huge concertina, the fun became fast and furious. Satisfied that the affair was well started and could be trusted to run its course, Hansen strolled over to the corner where Pete's passenger sat watching the noisy crowd with twinkling eyes.

"Gittin' pretty noisy, pardner," said Jake with his most engaging smile. "We're goin' to have a quiet sociable game in the card-room. Mebbe you'd like to join us an' git away from the row."

"I don't mind playin' a little while," the little man replied, "pervidin' the game ain't too steep."

"Just a small game to amuse ourselves, not to hurt anybody," Jake assured him.

They made their way through the excited crowd to a small room behind the bar where Hansen introduced two men, who were already seated at the card-table, as "Shorty" Wilson—so called perhaps because he was abnormally tall and very thin—and "Bud" Walker, who by contrast was short and very fat.

"Glad ter meechee, pard," said the tall man, his fox-like features twisted in what he intended for a smile. "Come in on the stage, didn't yuh? Had a dusty ride I reckon."

"Yeah! I'm lined with dust thet thick I'm feared to take a drink lest I git indigestion from over-eatin' mud pies."

"Here's somethin' that'll meet the situation," said Hansen as the bartender entered with a bottle and four glasses. "Guaranteed to make even dust taste good."

"I've heerd tell," the little man replied, "thet yuh git good licker here, an' I ain't refusin' it none. Not as I drink much but I likes to be sociable."

The drinks were duly absorbed, the glasses replenished ready for the next round, and preparations were made for the game. The stranger was seated opposite Hansen with Shorty on his right and the fat man at his left. No chips were used, the money itself represented every bet. Hansen and his two friends each placed a pile of bills and silver by his side and the stranger followed suit, taking from his pocket a sizeable roll from which he carefully counted two hundred dollars.

"I don't play poker much," he said as he placed the money on the table, "but seein' as I'm visitin' the country fer the first time, an' you're all so friendly, I don't mind losin' thet much. What might be the limit?"

"There ain't no limit anywheres on the road 'ceptin' the sky," Shorty answered. "Yuh kin make the game anythin' yuh like. We won't crowd yuh."

The little man beamed his pleasure at this assurance and the game began.

For a time the deal passed around without producing anything but the most ordinary hands and the betting was slow and uninteresting. Luck was impartial and no one was much ahead or behind the game. The first bit of excitement was introduced when the stranger was dealt a pat full-house for a jack-pot. The others all drew and for the first time the little man dipped into his roll to back his hand and, when the last man dropped out under his repeated raises, he drew in the first large winning of the game with open boyish glee.

But this bit of luck seemed to have a disastrous effect on his game. He began to draw to his cards in the most extraordinary manner, never by any chance making an orthodox draw to a promising hand except on his own deal. He refused to bet on hands that looked like sure winners but occasionally pulled off a bluff on nothing. Such a peculiar style of play could not win him anything, but neither did it leave him open to any large losses, and the size of his roll was little changed when the fat man dealt him a pat royal flush.

Jake Hansen, watching him across the table, saw the glitter of excitement in the boyish eyes, and his own eyes flashed when the stranger raised the ante. Shorty and the fat man drew out. Hansen drew one card and the betting began. The stranger opened with a bet of one hundred dollars. Jake studied his hand a moment, saw the bet and raised ten. This was met by a raise of one hundred and Jake raised another ten. Back and forth the bet passed, the stranger raising by hundreds and Hansen each time retorting by a raise of ten.

The little man made no effort to conceal his excitement. His roll was out on the table now and Hansen's keen eyes were watching it grow steadily smaller as the bills were peeled off for each hundred-dollar raise. At last, in meeting Hansen's monotonous ten-dollar bet, the stranger found that he had but two one hundred dollar bills left. These he threw on the pile in the center of the table saying—

"I'll raise yuh the rest o' my pile, an' I don't mind tellin' yuh I've got yuh beat."

Hansen paused for a full minute studying his cards and the little man's face, then, after slowly counting out the amount of the raise, he reached for his wallet and tossed another bill on the table.

"Raise yuh a thousand."

The little man stared in blank astonishment at Hansen's impassive face. He looked stupidly at the great heap of money on the table and the cards in his hand, then his eyes traveled to Shorty and the fat man who were openly grinning at his predicament.

"Well, stranger, is it my money?" Hansen asked with an evil grin on his thick lips.

"I s'pose yuh mean I've got to cover your raise or give yu the pot," the little man replied apparently still dazed.

"You've got it right," said Hansen, reaching out to draw the pile of money to him.

"Hold your hosses!" the little man drawled. "I'm only thinkin'."

He pulled up his woolen shirt and, from a money-belt worn next his skin, took a number of bills the denomination of which made Hansen turn pale.

"I reckon I'll have to see yuh, an' seein' as yuh 'pears to like high bettin' I'll raise yuh five thousand."

Hansen's face was a study. He was livid with rage at being beaten at his own game, and if vicious looks could kill this would have been the stranger's last stopping-place. For a moment he was tempted to make a rough-house of it and seize the money. His two tools were watching him for a sign to begin—but something in the little man's eyes, which were now cold and hard as steel, made him hesitate. It was not fear, however, that made him suddenly assume the jovial air of a good loser, but the recollection that he had other cards up his sleeve, and the stake was so much larger than he had expected, he was consoled for the delay.

"Well, pardner, you're too strong for me. I expect you've got 'em, an' I know when to quit. Shorty, get some drinks. We'll drink your health, stranger, an' call it off."

While the little man carefully stowed away his winnings Shorty went out to the bar and returned with four glasses of whisky which he placed on the table, one in front of each man. With no appearance of hurry the stranger reached over and changed his glass for the one in front of Hansen. The motion was so marvelously rapid and smooth it was almost sleight-of-hand, and before any one could remark on his action he was talking:

"I'm obliged to yuh gents. We've had a real nice sociable game. An' now as we're all friends mebbe yuh kin tell me somethin I wanta know. Last Winter I grub-staked a

pardner. He was only a kid an' he had no right to stack up agin grown men, but he had an old mother in the East an' he was dead set on makin' a stake so's she wouldn't have to work no more. He located on Thunder Creek an' was toler'ble lucky—cleaned up so quick he couldn't wait fer cold weather. He sold his claim an' hiked out, wantin' to git back to his mother before Winter, but somewheres he run up agin a stack o' trouble.

"He didn't know nothin' about poker an' he didn't drink none to speak of. He was a good kid an' innercent as a baby, an' some sneakin' coyotes got him in a poker game an' what they didn't take from him then they rolled him fer after he was doped, an' the pore kid had to hike back an' begin all over agin. Mebbe as yuh know the country yuh kin tell me where to look fer them gents as likes to rob kids. No? Well! Take your glasses gents an' we'll drink damnation to 'em."

Shorty and the fat man lifted their glasses without any show of enthusiasm but Hansen sat scowling at the stranger and made no move to join them.

"Drink hearty," he said. "I'm not drinkin' any more—had enough."

A startling change came over the face of the insignificant looking stranger. His boyish eyes became two blazing, searching points of fire. Some innate force and power seemed suddenly released from restraint.

"You dirty kid robber. Did yuh think I didn't know who I was playin' with? Why even a yaller dog knows a skunk when it gits in smellin' range. Yuh thought it was a safe game stealin' from a kid thet had no friends. Try stealin' from a man fer a change. I reckon yuh never run up agin one before or yuh wouldn't be pollutin' the earth. You're agin one now an' you're goin' to swaller thet drink or you're goin' to take the dangdest lickin' this booze-joint o' yours ever saw."

Jake stared at him with wide-eyed astonishment.

"I am, eh? An' mebbe you're goin' to give it to me."

"You've said it right," the little man admitted.

Hansen's gloomy face became positively cheerful as he rose from the table.

"I'll take the lickin' stranger, just as much as you kin give me. Come out in the bar so's you'll have plenty o' room. The

boys'll sure enjoy seein' you wipe the floor with Jake Hansen."

The little man showed no nervousness or hurry. He let the others go ahead and then picked up the glass that had been in front of Hansen and carried it carefully out to the bar. Hansen had stopped the perspiring musician and was making his announcement:

"Gents, we're goin' to give you a little entertainment that's not on the bills. This here stranger with the red whiskers an' bald head, seein' that we're sittin' round like mourners at a funeral, is kindly goin' to liven us up. He looks kind o' small but he's the champeen fighter o' Hickville an' he's goin' to amuse yuh by givin' me a lickin."

A roar of laughter went up from the half-drunken crowd who could see nothing in the announcement but preparation for some joke. They pressed back against the walls, herded by Shorty and the fat man, leaving the center of the room clear; and watched with curiosity while Hansen removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves and began to flex his heavy, muscled arms while continuing to joke with the bystanders.

The little stranger appeared entirely unconscious of the gibes and suggestions flung at him by the hilarious crowd. He had located Pete Saunders, who was leaning against the bar by the side of a big, loose-limbed cowboy, and to him he carried the glass of liquor he was still holding.

"Take care of this fer me, Pete," he said. "Don't let anybody touch it, an' don't drink it. It's doped."

"All right, old man, but what's the joke? You're not fightin' Hansen."

"Sure thing," the little man answered.

"But man! You're plum' crazy. He'll eat yuh alive."

"Mebbe. But I'm tough eatin'."

He took off his coat and handed it to Pete, and with the same unhurried movements rolled up the sleeves of his shirt exposing forearms that were surprizingly muscular. This completed his preparations and he stepped out in the cleared space and waited Jake's attack.



HANSEN approached his anticipated victim with a grin on his lips and, just before he reached striking distance, leaped forward and aimed a sweeping blow with open hand at the little man's

unguarded head. If it had landed as he expected, it would have sent his opponent sprawling among the rows of spectators, and Jake wanted to hear the roar of applause and laughter that would follow. But his hand encountered nothing but the atmosphere and, as he swung around under the impetus of his blow, something hit him with smashing force on the side of the jaw. The blow was not heavy enough to upset a man of Jake's build but, delivered by a fist with knuckles like iron and coming up from below, it cut his cheek to the bone.

"First blood to the runt!"

"Good work, Baldy!"

"Go it, little un!"

The crowd, perceiving that this promised to be a real fight, began to grow enthusiastic.

Hansen's grin had disappeared when he turned to face his elusive enemy. The failure of his attempt to make the little man ridiculous enraged him, and he determined to make short work of the impudent runt. He reckoned that one of his ferocious rushes would be enough, and he would batter the little fellow to a jelly.

But his blows, any one of which had it landed on the stranger would have ended the fight, never found anything to stop them. The agility and speed of the little man were something marvelous. Without apparent effort he dodged blow after blow, always bobbing up just out of reach, and again and again those smashing counters landed on Jake's bleeding face.

Hansen tried to maneuver the little man into a corner against the crowd where he could not dodge, but it was no use. Before he was quite in the desired position he would feint, dodge, and appear in the freedom of the open space. Hansen's rage increased with each wasted effort, but he was cool enough to realize that he could do nothing with this man while fighting at a distance. He must get his hands on the little scum and then — help him!

He no longer attempted to rush but stole slowly toward the quiet figure of the stranger, his head pushed forward and hands lowered, inviting the blow he intended should be the stranger's last. Closer and closer he crept until his face was within easy reach, and his hands were starting on their fierce dart for a hold, when something happened. It was all so quick no one of the watching men could see how it was

done. The little man, who had been standing so motionless, suddenly crouched and leaped, and the next instant Hansen's huge form was heaved up and over his shoulder and landed on the floor with a crash that shook the building. Hardly was he down when the little man was on him, pinning him with a grip that forbade a struggle except at the risk of a broken arm.

The men gathered about the room, many of them husky fighters themselves, had watched the battle with growing astonishment, and now expected to see the little man take advantage of his opportunity and punish Hansen to the limit—after the approved method of the rough and tumble fighter—but he was only talking.

"Well! Mr. Jake Hansen, I reckon you'll drink thet licker now," he was saying.

"Like — I will!" was Jake's unpromising reply.

"I've got all the time there is," the little man assured him, "an' you've been a danged sight more comfortable than yuh be just now. Before yuh git up you're goin' to take yer choice. You'll drink thet sample o' your own dope or you'll go down the road in handcuffs."

"What do yuh mean about handcuffs? Yuh haven't got nothin' on me."

"On Jake Hansen, mebbe not, but I've got a friend in Spokane thet's wantin' bad to see Bill Moore, an' I'd kinder like t'oblige him."

Hansen started to struggle but, warned by the strain on his arm, relaxed and shouted:

"Shorty! Take this — off me!"

"You stand still, Shorty!" came in a drawling voice from the big cowboy. "Nobody's goin' to interfere in this fight."

Shorty, who had taken a step toward the men on the floor, reconsidered and stepped back.

"Pete!" called the little man, "bring me thet licker. I reckon Jake's thirsty."

Pete brought the glass.

"Jake can't feed himself, he's kinder weak," the little man said. "You'll have to give it to 'im."

But Hansen was not yet subdued. He clinched his teeth and refused to take the whisky.

"All right! Pete, you'll find the bracelets in my coat, likewise a warrant. Looks like he's hankerin' for 'em. Easy now, Jake! Unless you're durn careful you'll only have one arm to wear the bracelets. Kind o' think you'd like a drink. Am I right?"

Hansen nodded and Pete held the glass to his swollen lips. Jake made an effort to spill the contents but a twist of his arm and a sharp warning from the stranger quelled the mutiny and he gulped it down. The little man rose and Hansen struggled painfully to his feet. For an instant he looked as if he would like to reopen the battle, but thought better of it and shuffled from the room.

The spectators remained huddled back by the walls, sensing that there was more to come of this unexpected entertainment. The little stranger stood alone in the open space, his eyes roving over the crowd until they rested on Shorty Wilson. Shorty had been working his way back in the crowd but his great height made it difficult for him to find cover.

"Now Mr. Shorty Wilson, you're next. You an' thet fat hog helped Hansen to rob my kid, an' it was you give him the dope. What I didn't take out o' your pocket I'm goin' to take out o' your measly hide. Step out here an' get your medicine."

But Shorty had reached the door through which the fat man had already disappeared and they were seen no more until after the stage had carried away the terrible little man the following morning.

The stranger surveyed the crowd with a grin on his face:

"Well, gents, I reckon the entertainment's over. I mighta knowed three grown men as'd rob a kid was all cowards. I'm gittin' to be an old man an' has to git to bed early, so I'll bid yuh good night. Pete, I'll take my coat."

Pete handed him his coat, and after watching the little man make his way out of the room, he turned to his cowboy friend:

"Bill Hawes told me he was a wonder but he didn't say half of it. Doggone it! There wa'n't no handcuffs an' warrant in thet coat."





The TREASURE of BOO-HOO

by FREDERICK MOORE

Author of "The Slick Guy," "Sea-Cooks and Seals," etc.

I THOUGHT it was a typhoon that intended to select several roofs from the buildings of Manila and put all the shipping ashore. It begins to grow up at the far end of Calle San Fernando and comes sweeping down in the direction of the customs house, and it looked like a young jimmycane, sure enough.

It happened while I was sitting out on deck of the schooner *Laughing Jane*, wishing Cap'n Coddles would pay me my wages so I could buy me a new pair of socks. Also, I was resting my mind. Maybe you don't think that being mate of the *Laughing Jane* takes any mind. In that case you don't know Cap'n Coddles. Somebody aboard our schooner has to have a mind.

I looks at the big black cloud of dust for a minute, and as it come nearer I could see flashes of fire at the bottom of it. Just then I makes out Cap'n Coddles in the middle of the dark cloud. It was him that was making the typhoon—he was coming so fast he took all the loose stuff in the street along with him, and the flashes of fire I seen was where the nails in his heels hit the hard spots and shot off sparks. He sure was coming.

"The skipper," thinks I to myself, "has found fifty cents and is hurrying aboard to hide it."

So I hangs in stays, pulls my hat on harder, and decides to wait and see what the rookus was. I knew it would be im-

portant—anything that could make Coddles move that fast deserved credit.

We was tied up at the bank of the river. When Cap'n Coddles arrived about ten feet off our beam, he goes straight up in the air like a rocket, and when he lights on the fore-hatch, he strikes so hard his glass eye pops out, his false teeth are unshipped, and his wig of hair goes under his chin, making him look like an inventor with whiskers.

He puts his eye back.

"Mr. Faggin," he begins on me, sober-like, "we're rich!"

I bows.

"Cap'n," says I, "I'll believe anything when you begin to 'mister' your mate—and I'm special pleased to hear you say *we*. It sounds like a king, or a editor."

"Oh, you're included," says Coddles. "I never left you out of anything good."

"How much will it cost to git rich?" I asks.

"Cost?" says he.

"It always does," says I. "And I know the symptoms when you want to make a borrow."

"Borrow for what?" he asks.

"To make us rich," says I.

He slants his good eye at me, and grits his false teeth back into place.

"I dunno," says he, cross-like, "that I ought to let you in on this, after all. You're the ding-dangest—"

"You're talking natural now," says I. "And I'll be satisfied with being as rich as the back pay you owe me makes me."

"The Treasure of Boo-Hoo," copyright, 1924, by Frederick Moore.

He grabs me by the arm, tears in his good eye, and with the other hand pushes his wig of hair behind his ears.

"I've just heard something that's worth to us five million dollars—if not ten!"

"Ten dollars is nearer," says I. "It'll save a lot of worry on income taxes, too."

But he was all excited up. And when that happens, you can't stop him with a hog-fence and a hickory-ellum club. So I just relaxes, as the new patent medicine that comes in the form of books says to do, and makes myself passive, and thinks of all the things I'll git if I wants 'em hard enough and the sheriff don't catch me at it, while Coddles drug me into the cabin, where Pie Gow was cutting ruffles in the dough-cover for a stew that was to be baked for supper.

"We're rich," says Coddles. "Mud rich! We got gold enough to give you the blind staggers, just to look at it!"

"I'm ready," says I, "to suffer from that complaint, if you've got the gold to cure it. It's just the shock I been hankering for."

"We're rich!" says Coddles, throwing up his hands. "We're——"

"You said it before," I reminds him. "What I want is the staggers."

"If," says Coddles, "we can find 'Droopy' Dodds, we just as good got fifteen million dollars!"

"Why 'if' it?" I asks.

"We're rich as creases," he raves on, "and I intend to buy a yacht and go to Monte Carlo and bust the bank, and buy me an extra vest, and eat my breakfast in bed, and have a band play——"

"That's considerable remark you started," I stops him. "But, as the policemen in London say, remember that whatever you say'll be used against you."

"What do you mean by that, Faggin?"

"Nothing. I'm just talking like a fortune-teller—and so be you. What's the next move?"

"Can you find Droopy Dodds?" he asks.

"I can, if I start looking before the saloons close."

"All right—that settles it. It means a matter of a trifle over twenty million dollars in gold."

"You mean mushrooms, don't you?"

"What do you mean, mushrooms?"

"It grows so fast," says I. "Why don't you make it thirty millions?"

He gives a jump and looks at me suspicious.

"You've heard!" he says.

"Only from you."

"Then why did you say thirty millions?"

"Because it don't put no more strain on you to say—nor on me to hear. But beware," says I, my voice low down in my throat, "because Pie Gow is listening, and he may forget to make the stew for supper."

Coddles waves his hand at the Chink cook.

"Bear away the stew-fixings," says Coddles, lofty like, being now a rich man in every way except having the money, "I never did like to see stew before it has its jacket on—there's something too intimate about it. I never like to know beforehand what's in stew."

"So I've noticed when I ate it," says I. "But let's have a little more fortune-telling," and I puts my feet up on the cushions, not caring what happened.

"Faggin," says Coddles, when Pie Gow was gone, "I heard a man talk up in Timke's Place——"

"Oh," I breaks in, "that accounts for it. Two of Timke's Great Mogul cocktails has conquered the world more'n once—till the police showed up."

"It was one of these history sharks," goes on Coddles, "that digs around in old books and finds things out about past ages, and pirates, and——"

"Did he see you?" I asks.

"Pirates, and treasures that's been buried, and Spanish relics, and all kinds of things that the world is busting open to know. Now he says there's an island down south of here that's got a ship buried in it that's full of gold bars——"

"Why don't he go get it himself?" I breaks in.

"That's just where we got the bulge on him," says Coddles. "He ain't read far enough in this old book to know the secret."

"Timke's is a fine place to tell secrets," says I. "Special, about islands full of gold."

"It don't do no harm," says Coddles. "All he knows yet is that the island has a big stone on it with an inscription—and I've heard Droopy Dodds tell of that very island. We'll beat the history shark to it. The ship was one of them old Spanish galley-ons that was lost with all hands about the time of Columbus,* or Magellan, or Benedict Arnold. In them days there was a deep lagoon in the middle of the island,

but since that time it's filled up with mud——"

"Mud is right!" says I.

"With mud," goes on Coddles. "And on the mud there's now a native village. But the natives don't know there's a galley-on under one of their houses, not being able to read the inscription on the stone. So we stand to make twenty-five million—cold."

"It certainly looks good," says I, "considering——"

"Faggin, I'm glad to see you so enthusiastic!" says Coddles.

"Considering," I goes on, "that there's only a hundred million islands down south of here, all spread out so they're easy to find in the dark. We might even bump the *Laughing Jane* right into this island——"

"But Droopy Dodds knows which one!" says Coddles. "That's what hands a fortune to us!"

"Unless Droopy hears of it, too," says I. "Or somebody else, who knows where that island is. How can you be sure of that?"

"There's only one other man besides Droopy," says Coddles, "and that's 'Spunk' Slade, skipper of the bark, *Landsman's Home*. And—Spunk heard this history shark talk, just as I did, and started for his bark the same time I started for the schooner. As the *Landsman's Home* is out in the bay behind the breakwater, he's got a good chance to sail before we do—and we've got to find Droopy or we're goners for that thirty million."

"Unless we can out-sail Spunk. What you'd better do, is tell Pie Gow to open the draft in the galley stove."

"What for?" asks Coddles.

"So the smell of the stew can float up the Mole—that'll find Droopy easy enough. He never could resist stew."



CODDLES gives the order, and we goes out on deck to see if the *Landsman's Home* was making sail. But we couldn't see her from where we lay. But just then we sees Droopy, nose up, heading down the Mole on a hunt for the smoke that carried the smell of our stew. He walks like a measuring worm.

You know Droopy. Originally he started to be born for the front end of a giraffe. He was so tall he could eat apples off the trees, and so thin he was always being mistook for a tin wall, seen edgeways. He had a long neck that he had to keep folded down,

and a Adam's Apple he could have hired out to a circus as a curiosity. And he was that sad-looking that he never had no success in life, everybody thinking he was the hangman out of a job. He was infected with playing the harmonica.

"Droopy!" yells Coddles, "Hurry up! You're just in time for supper!"

"Who calls the King of Lower Egypt?" asks Droopy, as he luffs up into the wind and looks around.

"We can't tell him what it is we wants from him," Coddles says to me, under his mustache. "But we'll git the information out of him, if we have to take him along."

Droopy comes over the side, almost smiling, having made sure where the stew was concealed. He parted his hair in front with his fingers, and was ready to sit down for supper. He had on a suit of brown crash that looked as if it'd been made out of a hemp bale, a straw hat with a blue band, and he carried a cane that could have been used to beef a bull. Just why they called him Droopy I never heard, but his eyes drooped, his mouth drooped, his brown mustache drooped, and his shoulders drooped. And his ears drooped as if he'd been crossed in love. To get through the cabin door he had to make his knees droop.

"I was just on my way to the Manila Hotel," says he, "to have dinner with the ambassador from——"

"Oh, let him eat alone," breaks in Coddles. "Take off your gloves and cane, and sit down. You're among friends."

"Yes," says I, "but don't tell nobody the time or they'll have your watch." Only I said it under my breath.

"Real pleasant afternoon," says he, as he put his hat in his pocket. "I just drove down across the Bridge of Spain in my limousine, and told my chauffeur to wait while I took a stroll along the water-front."

With that he puts his feet under the table to hide the holes in his shoes.

"Droopy," says Coddles, as he blew the stew to cool it, "I hearn you tell some time back about an island that had a lagoon in it that was filled up with mud, and a native village on it."

Droopy lets his eyes wander from his plate.

"Why, yes, cap'n," he admits. "When I was in my yacht——"

"And it had a stone, this island, with an inscription on it as hard to read as a sub-way sign, eh?" Coddles draws him on.

"Quite so, quite," says Droopy.

Coddles shuts down on his false teeth hard and makes a gritty noise.

"What particular island, and what particular place?" asks Coddles.

Droopy lifts his head with a great effort and looks at the skylight. I knew he was suspicious.

"You ding-danged fool!" says I to Coddles, "you stabbed the stew too prompt—and you put too many particulars into your question!" It was a cautious whisper.

Coddles kicks me in the shins under the table.

"I can't remember what island that was," says Droopy. "At the time, I wrote my friend, the Duke of——"

"Don't bother with dukes, but think!" says Coddles.

"Give me time," says Droopy.

"And stew," says I, sarcastic like.

"What particular reason have you for wanting this particular island for?" asks Droopy.

"None of your ding-danged business!" says Coddles, and begins to hunt for the bones in the stew, to cut down Droopy's nourishment.

"As a diplomat you make a fine coal-heaver," says I to Coddles.

"Gently, brother, gently, pray," says Droopy.

"You got that out of a poem," says I. "Don't come aboard here to eat, and begin dude remarks."

"Belay the gab!" roars Coddles. "Maybe if you come and cruise with us, you could remember where that island was," says Coddles. "You come along of us in the *Laughing Jane*, and if you can find that island, I'll throw in the grub free, give you a fine boat-ride—and four dollars and a half."

"Cap'n Coddles, I might explain," says I to Droopy, "is suffering from an awful attack of the disease known as creeping generosity, and if you don't watch him, he's likely to go to extremes."

"It's just a matter of sentiment with me," says Coddles.

"I don't quite grasp it," says Droopy, as he picks up his knife and fork.

"If you did," says I to myself, "you'd cut off his ears."

"It's this way," says Coddles, which he always said when he didn't know what he was going to say, and wanted time to think

up a lie. "It's this way—I once had a cat aboard, and I lost him on that island. I can't remember where it was—maybe I will, though that won't spoil my offer if you remember on the way down before I do."

"To be safe," says Droopy, "I suppose it would be wise for me to collect that four and a half before we start. Also, it'll make me remember."



SO CODDLES pays him, and we drops down the river and out into the bay. And before we got out, the *Landsman's Home* was close astern of us.

"We've got to beat Spunk to it, if we lose every mast," says Coddles to me as we stood on deck. Droopy was below asleep, that being his nature.

"We ought to do well," says I, "considering we don't know where we're going."

"That ain't what's worrying me," says Coddles.

"What's the low-down on difficulties?" I asks.

"That history shark said there was a native house probably built right a-top of where that galley-on was buried. And as there's more than a hundred native houses, how are we going to know which it is?"

"Looks to me like we'll have to dig a hundred cellars," says I, thinking hard.

"But what if Spunk knows which house it is—and gets there first?" asks Coddles.

"Well, that complicates things," I admits. "The only way I can see out of it is that the natives won't let Spunk dig up their cellars."

"You'll have to think some fancy business," says Coddles. "I supplied the original idea, and now it's up to you to finish it off."

"Oh, sure," I says. "I like to tackle any mess you bring home. Now, all we have to do is buy all the houses on the island before Spunk arrives. That'll put the bones in his hash."

"Simple," says Coddles. "Simple and plain."

"Plain as mud," says I. "My plans always do work out well."

"Simple and plain," repeats Coddles. "Except for one trifle."

"What's that?"

"After I paid Droopy, I only got forty cents left. And we can't buy a hundred native houses for that."

"Not unless real estate has gone down

disastrous on this island we don't know where it is. I pass—you think a little."

"That's what you're hired for," snaps Coddles.

"All right," I says. "Just wait a minute, while I put salt on the tail of an idea."

"It's got to be honest," says Coddles.

"Sure!" I comes back. "You wouldn't steal anything—if anybody was looking. Ain't you got some planed pine-boards in the hold? And some red paint?"

"It don't take the seventh son of a seventh son to know that," sneers Coddles.

"Don't it?" says I. "Well, watch my wake. Tomorrow morning we start in and paint some signs that says you own all the buildings on this island, we hang 'em up on the houses, and offer 'em for sale."

"You're simpler'n I thought," says Coddles. "How can I sell the houses on this island if I don't own 'em?"

"I can see," says I, "that your education has been neglected on how to impress your personality on people so they'll do whatever you asks 'em to do, and thank you for the favor. I took a course in that, when I was selling Tiger Marrowfat Salve."

"Step on the gas and make that idea buzz a little," says Coddles.

"I already have," I tell him. "Only you didn't connect. I didn't say you owned anything—not even good sense. I'd hate to have to admit it, knowing you as I do."

"But that stuff of yours about signs was too thick."

"Not the signs, but your head," says I. "Now look at it this way—if you can't read a sign, you don't know what it means, do you?"

"Not unless you ask a policeman."

I spits savage-like, but keeps my temper.

"When I was on the road selling salve, I learned what a lot of boobs there is in the world. You're the last discovery, and the champion of the lot, but let that pass if you want to collect that—how many millions was it?"

"Thirty-five," says Coddles.

"All right. This island has no policeman, which is lucky for us. The natives can't read the signs, as I said. But when Spunk Slade blows in, he can read 'em—and if there's a sign on every house he'll see you own the town."

"Eureka Soap, as the Greek gent said when he found a bar of it!" says Coddles.

"I'll give you an extra hundred dollars for that idea!"

"Don't!" I begged. "I hate to see you git rash—it makes me greedy and selfish. Somebody said once that an idea's worth a fortune. Take the idea—I'm as full of 'em as a bird-pup is of fleas."

"There's a fly in the disappointment, though," says Coddles.

"Where?" I asks.

"What if the natives won't let us hang them signs on their houses?"

"Then hang the natives," says I. "That's what they used to call conquest back in the days before they stopped wars."

"I'd hate to have to hurt their feelings," says Coddles, sad-like.

"And I'd hate to be broke," says I. "But I can see you're not fitted by temperature—temperament—to have—forty millions."

"Oh, don't worry none about that," says Coddles. "I can do a lot of good with all that money."

"Oh, I ain't worrying none. But I've been thinking for you, which is what all millionaires hires somebody to do, and you've got a good start just by having me with you. All we have to do is sell the signs to the natives—tell 'em they're charms against bad luck to hang on their front piazzas. That's profit for us from the start, which is a good way to run a business."

"But what good'll it do us if the natives do hang 'em up?"

"Nothing much," says I, "except that the money we get for the signs will finance buying the house that Spunk Slade will tell us he wants when he comes. That saves us the trouble of having to find the right house. When we see which one he wants, just don't sell it—go and buy it."

Coddles pretends he's thinking.

"Good idea, ain't it?" I asks.

"Fine idea. But there's a catch in it somewhere."

"Oh, yes," says I, deep down in my throat, sarcastic-like. "A catch of forty-five million dollars. Would you mind telling me what's wrong with the idea?"

"It don't seem just right that a man with a brain like yours should be working for a boob like me."

"That's Providence," says I.

"Providence!" says Coddles. "Why, I never been in Rhode Island!"

"I've suspected it," says I. "People who

have been there, learn something to their advantage, as the lawyers' advertisements say."



WELL, in the morning the *Landsman's Home* wasn't in sight, but we couldn't tell whether we'd left her behind or she was ahead of us. So we starts in to make signs, Coddles sawing the boards and me doing the painting. I put a lot of queer little doodabs in the corners so they'd look charmy to the natives—bull's eyes, snake's head, stars, and hearts with arrows through 'em, and arty things like that.

Droopy wouldn't help.

"My contract," says he, as he sits on the hatch and watches us art things up, "calls for no menial labor. Anyway, I hate the smell of paint."

"Almost as bad as you hate the smell of stew," says I.

"I'm here for what I know," he comes back.

"I guess you're right," I replies, going along fast making fancy letters with the brush. "Four dollars and a half covers about all the intellect that's loose around you."

He stretches his neck up and looks dignified.

"I never engaged in labor with my hands," says he.

"Only at meals," I says, dreamy-like.

"Mr. Faggin," says he, "I'd have you know that I'm from New York. I come of a good family—and I'm related to nearly all the statues in Central Park."

"Droopy," says Coddles, as he wiped some paint off his thumb on his pants, "You're a long ways from home."

"Yes," says I, "and what's more important, you ain't told us where the island is. If you're paid for what you know, make your wheels go round."

"I remembered before breakfast," says Droopy. "The island ain't on any chart, but the name of it is Boo Hoo."

"You're so prompt with information," says Coddles. "Do you know how to find Boo Hoo?"

Droopy squints up his eyes and looks at the horizon.

"It's about time to turn to the left," says he.

"That's easy," says Coddles. "But if we come to it in the night, and can't see the island, how'll we recognize it?"

"If it's dark," says Droopy, "all you have to do is listen. And you'll know it's Boo Hoo when you hear the native ladies singing to their sweethearts."

"Simple enough for any practical navigator," says Coddles, and he orders the *Laughing Jane* turned to the left—quite a good deal.

In four days we raises an island that was shaped like a tub with the inside of it kind of scooped out—that was the old lagoon that had filled up with mud and trees and natives. And when we looked inside the island from the opening, we counted a hundred and two houses among the trees.

"Luck's with us!" says Coddles. "We've got just that number of signs painted."

Droopy pricks up his ears at that.

"There's something in this that I don't know about," he says.

"A man's made a good beginning in life," says I, "when he knows that he don't know nothing."

"What's the hocus-pocus?" asks Droopy.

"You go into the cabin," says I, "or I'll hocus your pocus over the side, island or no island."

And he does that little thing.

"Well," says Coddles to me, "we've beat Spunk to it. But who's going to sell these signs under the disguise of charms?"

"Me, I'll sell 'em myself," says I. "Before I took up the sailing trade serious enough to go to sea, I sold Tiger Marrow-fat Salve on street corners, and made big pay before I got arrested for claiming to be a doctor on nothing but a wedding certificate."

So we leaves Droopy behind, and takes the signs ashore in the dinghy. The natives was all waiting for us, so I leads the way up into a grove that was out of sight of the *Laughing Jane* and cuts loose in my best professional manner.

"Friends, rum 'uns, and furriners," I begins, with my hand in my shirt-front, elegant-like, and the signs piled up at my feet, "lean your ears my way. We have come to your beautiful island of Boo Hoo on a mission for suffering humanity, me being the leading human. I need the cash. Look at me and be sorry."

"You're telling the truth, I'll admit that much," says Coddles under his mustache.

"This day," I goes on, "ranks in your history with the day you was discovered—ranker, in fact. It costs you a lot of money

to be discovered, and you ain't done paying yet.

"However, I'll come to the point. We have brung for you a lot of charms that out-charm anything ever seen, and if you'll count 'em you'll discover that we've brought only one for each person that owns a house. That proves I'm liberal, and I'll expect you to co-operate, reciprocate, and liquidate.

"These charms cure all human ills of man or beast, both or either, or combined. I'll be conservative and state that one of these charms cures everything from sunburn to housemaid's knee, wards off the evil eye and the tax-collector, unsquints squinty eyes, straightens bow-legs with a facility that makes the joints go into place with a click, takes the knock out of knock-knees, cures stuttering or cross eyes with equal ease, and is sure death to Fourth of July orators. You may not have any children yourself, but your daughters will have and this is a family need. You can't be without 'em, and I can't get along without the money, so we're on even footing if you don't stop to think it over.

"Now about these charming charms. They was collected by me in an Egyptian pyramid on the banks of the Orinoco River, which is proven to you by the freshness of the paint. The Gip that made 'em died too long ago to remember, so he can't make any more, which limits the supply. But that Gip was a wizard—in fact, nobody has ever out-wizzed him. These charms was made from the fat out of the marrows of the bones of a Royal Bengal tiger, captured in the private preserves of a Raja of India, and brought down by the lasso, while——"

"Here, you fathead!" Coddles whispers to me. "You've switched your dope to your Tiger Marrowfat spiel, and you've nearly jackassed the job!"

I catches myself just in time, and resumes:

"As I was saying, gents and all, this charm has never been equalled and seldom imitated. It dates back to the time of Mo, Ham, and Dan, who established the well-known Mohammedan Government which was named after them three birds. Buy one, hang it on your piazzas, and go on your way rejoicing. All this for the sum of two dollars each; and as proof of my honesty, I'll pay the war tax myself. Catch 'em while they're falling, gents!"

Was them signs popular? Did they sell?

Say! Did you ever have a chance to sell files in a penitentiary?

We takes in two hundred and four dollars, and in fifteen minutes every house on the island of Boo Hoo has a sign on its front piazza that reads—

FOR SALE—Cap. Coddles, Prop.



JUST as we starts back for the *Laughing Jane*, we sees the *Landsman's Home* running up to her anchorage, and Spunk Slade getting out his dinghy to come ashore.

"We'll wait right here," says Coddles to me. "Now's the time we finds out what house has the galley-on under it."

So when Spunk comes ashore and sees us sitting under a coconut-tree, he gives us the old question-mark eye. He was a short, fat man, who never wore a collar, but has cuffs on his pants. He had manners as good as a waiter's—a real nice looking man, if you looked the other way.

"There's something in the wind," says he. "And something that's against the law, too, with you birds snooping around."

"Say, Spunk," says Coddles. "Want to buy a house?"

Spunk gives a start, and then looks up the street, and as far as eye could hear, he sees them signs.

"Oh, I own 'em all," says Coddles.

Spunk hisses through his teeth.

"Foiled!" he says, just like a gent crook in a book.

"You said it," says Coddles, triumphant-like, sucking his thumb to keep from laughing at how easy we'd beat him. "But we'll sell you one if you'll choose the one you like."

"It would be kind of handy to own one," says Spunk.

"Pick it out," says Coddles, careless-like.

Spunk looks up the street, critical-like, and twists his head to make sure he was picking the right one.

"That one that looks like a saloon, at the corner of Woodchuck Avenue and Coconut Street," he says, pointing his finger.

"We've got him!" I whispers. "Be careful!"

"Not for sale," says Coddles. "I intend to keep that for my own use—and dig a deep cellar under it."

"But that's the only one I want—and I'll pay a good price for it," says Spunk, tears coming in his eyes.

"The price," says Coddles, "is sixty million dollars."

"You know the truth!" hisses Spunk, stepping back, and rolling his eyes like *Simon Legree* in "Uncle Tom's Cabin"—and he done it so good I looked around for the bloodhounds.

"You're in my power!" says Coddles. "Touch one gray hair on yon gray head——"

"I don't wish you no harm," says Spunk, "but I hopes you swell up and bust!"

And with that he starts back for his dinghy.

We goes up and buys that identical house for exactly two hundred and four dollars, which is what we got for the signs. And as the natives owned everything all together, they gets their money divided up again, everybody getting their two dollars back. It worked like a—charm. We own the house.

When we've paid up, we go up on the piazza and sit down in a chair and cross our legs.

"We certainly got the brains," says Coddles, putting his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "We start with nothing, and wind up owners of the house that's over the treasure!"

"We are," I agrees. "But I don't see you got any call to act like a hero in the movies."

"Me!" says he. "Why, I'm the main cheese in this thing! You didn't believe me when I told you at first—fortune-telling, you called it!"

"I'll feel better," says I, "when we've had a session in the cellar with a pick and shovel. And you'd better take down the 'For Sale' sign—we own the place now."

"If we don't leave it up, the natives'll git suspicious," says Coddles. "No, we believe in signs, and it's our bounden duty to show a good example to the heathens. Let the sign stay—what you can do is go back to the schooner and fetch me the royal bottle of gin and the royal cigar-lighter."

I takes a slant at him, but he looks normal as usual.

"Say," I asks, "what's that line of chatter?"

"Who are you to be asking me questions like that?" comes back Coddles. "Don't I own this house, and all the land under it clear through to Maine. Also, that includes the galley-on's treasure."

"Why," says I, "ain't it wonderful how

you've changed since you asked me on board the *Laughing Jane* how all that you just said was to be did! My, but you're grand!"

"Seventy million dollars worth of grandeur," he says, calm and cool. "Faggin, obey the royal commands!"

"Come again with that!" I announces.

"I don't give an order but just once," he says.

"Say, look here!" I says, getting mad. "Don't you think a poor fish like me, who didn't do nothing but think up how to make you rich and royal, deserves a little royal mercy?"

"How so?" he asks, knocking the ashes off his cigar with his little finger, a little trick he had when he had more'n ten dollars at one time.

"The way I just said," says I.

"You think something up!" he scorns, lofty-like. "Why, you poor sardine's son, if I had a head like yourn I'd start a dice factory with all that ivory!"

For that I kicks him clean off the piazza.

Coddles picks himself up in the road and dusts his pants.

"What do you mean by that?" he asks, humble-like.

"Exactly what happened," I tells him. "You've got a good start on the way to the schooner for your own ding-danged royal cigar-lighter. I'm just as royal as you be—and royaler. If there's going to be any king business around here, I'm the boss king."

"Well, you don't need to be so rough," says Coddles. "That ain't no way to start."

"That's the way they all started," I replies, sitting down and folding my hands. "I've declared war."

"We don't need to have no trouble," says Coddles. "I'm a peaceful man, myself, and you don't need to r'ar up like that because I made a suggestion—I didn't mean nothing."

"Neither did I when I kicked you off the piazza," says I. "You'd better go back to the schooner and fetch a pick and shovel and a lantern."

So he starts for the beach, not quite so royal.



HE COMES back with the mining-gear, and that night we starts to dig under the house. We had quite a hole by daylight, and just as we starts back to the schooner for breakfast, we hears a

racket up the road, and the chief swearing in native.

"Gosh!" says Coddles, as he looks back. "There's a riot started!"

All the brown boys in the town was swarming down on us, collecting signs off the buildings as they come, and the chief jabbering at 'em like a wild man. We waits to see what it's all about, and the chief begins to give us an ear-full.

"Look!" he yawps at me. "I'm all wet—I paid two bucks for this charm, and the first thing I does this morning when I gits up, is fall in a well!"

"What's that got to do with it?" I asks, just to gain time.

"I've been skinned!" he says.

"So I observe," says I. "Anybody would be that'd fell in a well."

"But the charm!" he insists. "It's no good—and we've all been skinned."

"Put the charm back, and you'll be all right," I soothes him. But he wasn't a bit soothy.

"My lungs is caved in," he goes on, "and my heart palpitates!"

"That charm that you hold in your hand so careless-like," I tells him, "will make your heart sound as a dollar, and your lungs perfect as a day in June. Just have confidence——"

With that he throws the sign at me. I ducks it, and Coddles accumulates it on his neck. We head for the beach, and behind us comes the whole town of natives—throwing signs at us.

As we get to our dinghy, we see that a coast-guard cutter has come in during the night and is anchored alongside Spunk's bark.

The natives backed up when they seen

the cutter, and we rows out to the schooner, where we finds Droopy leaning on the bulwarks and laughing his head off.

"You seem to be all excited up," says he, as we come over the side. "What's going on ashore—picnic or something?"

"You shut your ding-danged face!" says Coddles.

"Did you find the galley-on and the gold?" asks Droopy.

"Now who told you about that?" asks Coddles.

"Oh, the coast-guard men," says Droopy.

"They brought word that your history shark was arrested right after we left Manila for giving out phoney information about an island with treasure. It turns out that he's a swindler wanted in Hong Kong for selling the Peak Hotel to a tourist."

"Seventy million dollars gone to the dogs!" weeps Coddles, as he sits down on the hatch. "And a pick and shovel and my second-best lantern!"

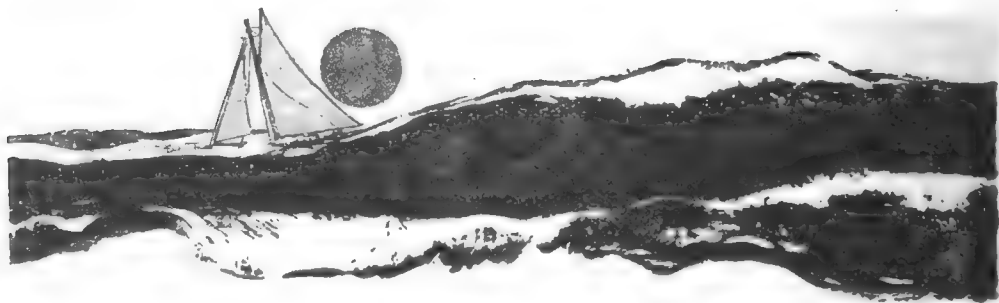
"The world is full of crooks," says Droopy.

"You said it!" says Coddles. "A honest man ain't got a chance any more! Here I buys a house, nice and honest, and I'm cheated out of it, after all the good we done them natives."

"It ain't right!" I admits to Coddles. "You're bunked. I don't know what's gitting into folks, they act so dishonest!"

"It's a ding-danged outrage!" says Coddles, and busts out crying for his pick and shovel and lantern—and our two hundred and four dollars, and all the nice lumber we lost in the signs.

"This island," says I, "ain't named right. Instead of Boo Hoo, it ought to be named Boo Hoo Hoo!"



WHAT is the hardest part of a day-laborer's life?

I'll tell you what I think. I think the horrible thing is to live with nothing beautiful about one's poor little home—devoid of flowers, with no song-bird near; surrounded by the ever-present and constantly insistent thought of the grim necessity of labor that wearies one until one's mind grows numb.

What ought to be done to those Christian gentlemen who advocate a 'living wage'—and sit in luxury at home themselves?

I've lived on a 'living wage' for many and many a year. It did not include flower, bird or book.

I don't speak for myself, I know, when I say that the day-laborer often becomes, in a manner, similar to the team he drives. He looks forward to the noon hour, then to his quitting time; longing for a sight, at any rate, of those things that are his own, the faces that he loves, and for whose welfare he lives, when work is scarce, in constant dread.

The high-flown people, professors, and so forth, tell us that there is 'nobility in labor.' What a lot more of it there might be if they had a little more love for their fellow-men in their hearts and a little less pomposity and eagerness to teach—if we might in some way rearrange our social system so that every working-man might know something of the restful things of life, as well as knowing its turmoil.

The flower, the bird, and every lovely thing, is likely to lose its power to improve the mind of man when he is overborne with the stern struggle for his mere existence.

There are a half-dozen children gathering flowers near to my house.

It's a gay April morning.

Yesterday, in town, a strong and able-bodied fellow asked me for the price of a meal. His eye was shifty and he carried the scent of liquor on him.

These little towns are full of loafers who cadge from passers-by at street corners. They are blind to bird and flower; blinded long ago. They sit about in dismal pool-halls, or spit into the gutter at the street

sides: their life a procession of days without a meaning; an existence with less of nobility to it than there is in the honest existence of the work-horse in his traces.

I'm sorry for the shifty-eyed men. I know what made a good many of them what they are.

Whose fault is it?

These kids who gather wild-flowers by my house are shouting with joy, overcome with the delights of earth's beauties around them. When they grow up will some of them go out to labor? To grow weary and disappointed and hopeless? To mix with the cadger-men who will tell them that life is only a lie and governments are blasphemies?

Who makes the cadger-man?

It's a queer jumble, isn't it?

Dives and Lazarus?

Every one who knows a peace, and has a flower or two is Dives, isn't he? How is he to share his wealth with Lazarus of the broken spirit?

Let an untaught, tired man growl and they call him names—bolshevik, or so forth.

Let those who would rule first learn to work. Can't we in America ever remember that this is a common man's country? Founded by men who wore their sleeves rolled up and were not afraid to sweat, and didn't care if they didn't know how to spell—as long as they were honest?

God built this old world upon a cornerstone of Love, and when brotherhood ceases from man to man, then man desecrates the building.

I am one of the common herd. I am a day-laborer. Give me a little peace, a breath of freedom—your honest fist in mine, below your honest eye.

Withhold these things, and do not call me bolshevik, or any other newfangled name when I, untaught, body-weary, half-broken in my spirit, also forget that love is this old world's foundation—that brotherhood is the key-note of man's life—and become embittered.

The key is in the hand of Dives, isn't it, and the gulf is still unbridged.

The LORD of ST. LO by H. C. BAILEY



Author of "The Tale of a Hammer," "The Best of the Three," etc.

TODAY to you, tomorrow to me," said Silvain. "Keep me a place, lads."

He put the rest of the sausage in his mouth and waved to his companions and strode off.

There were three of them hanging in the walnut-tree. With a creak of ropes the bodies swayed to the wind and turned faces which had no eyes. Silvain went up the white road singing. It was the year of grace 1483.

He came back to France a large fair youth who carried his head high, having found no other fortune. He walked quick and light, with a singular grace as though he were poised to dash on or turn or spring aside. That distinguished him, that and the thrown-back head which seemed to look at a far horizon. The dust of November was gray upon his hose and his leather doublet. His only decoration was the dagger at his girdle.

When the road turned to avoid the steep scarp of the chalk hills a man stood out to meet him and suddenly, so that they came chest to chest.

"Halt, fellow!" It was a raucous cry, with an oath and a scowl behind it.

"Why, so I do," Silvain said gently.

The man was armoured in helmet and coat of mail; he had a hand jerking at his sword.

"In the King's name stand!"

He worked his black brows.

"Look you, fellow, there is a toll on all

who pass this way for the mending of the bridge. It is an ordinance of the king. Ten sous, my gallant."

He held out his left hand.

"Good faith, good master, I have crossed no bridge."

Silvain drew back.

"But you will cross it, fool."

"I hope so, indeed. If it please God."

Silvain took off his cap. "But alas, my master, I have no money."

"You lie, a base treacherous lie. What, you will cheat the king's officer? Open your scrip, boy."

Silvain spread empty hands. The man laughed.

"Oh, you are a sack that must be slit."

Out came the sword.

While Silvain seemed still drawing back he sprang in and the hilt of his dagger took the man between the eyes. The man went down and the sword flew. Silvain took that and before the man knew what was happening he found Silvain sitting on his chest unbuckling his sword belt.

"So, so."

Silvain put on the belt and kissed the sword blade and thrust it into the scabbard.

"It shall lose no honor with me." He stood up and made a bow.

"I have great pleasure that I met you, my lord."

"A robber," said the man sitting up, "a rascal. But you are mad. Do you not see what I am? Look at my helmet—"

which had fallen off—"my brigandine—" he patted a coat of overlapping plates of steel, like a fish's scales—"the king's livery, boy. I am a Frank archer. By St. Trignan, you have hanged yourself if the provost hear of you!"

"Good master, you would not tell tales."

"Now the fiend burn your impudence!"

The man thrust upon him again.

"Peace be with you, poor soul," said Silvain and pulled out the sword.

The man fell on his knees and held out his hands.

"Grace, my lord, I will spare your life. You are a free man from this hour."

Silvain laughed and pulled him up.

"By Our Lady of Vire, this is a hard world for honest folk," says he making a grimace at his sword as it was sheathed again by Silvain's side.

"You are too good for it, brother," Silvain smiled. "Come, let us make it better."

The man drew back.

"No, no. You have my sword. But I will fight for my coat. And I will die for my breeches."

"Brother, you shall have a sword on each side, by God's grace."

The man stared at him.

"Now who are you that smile like mother's milk and go about to earn hanging?"

"I am called Silvain de St. Lo, brother. And here's my life in your hand."

The man looked at him.

"You are mad or you lie. God pity you, my lord, I think you are mad."

"Have you anything to lose, brother?"

"One life only, my lord. And I love it well."

"So do I mine. But I have a castle and lands if I can win them."

"Peace, peace. I have a mansion in heaven if I can get there. But here I have a hole in the ground."

He pointed up the steep hillside.

"It is better. Come and see."

He took Silvain's arm and climbed fast. Silvain was propelled into a cave in the chalk. The mouth was concealed by bushes of juniper. It was so low that they bent double to go in, but beyond there was room enough and a comfortable smell of onions.

"God bless you, brother," said Silvain.

"No man has taken me to his home this long while."

"Since you come asking for a 'home underground, best have one you can get out of. Stand close and look."

He pointed to the road below where four men were riding: they were lightly armed but they bore lance and shield. On their black breast-plates was painted a red bull's head.

"They are of the Baron de Criqueboeuf's household. What is that to me, brother? I do not challenge him."

"Said the hare of the fox. But once a young hare sought an old hare and bade him follow and drive the sheep from their good clover and take it and live fat, and while they talked of this came by an old dog fox and had hare to his dinner."

"And so these hares are gone to ground," Silvain smiled.

"No wise man talks of what is his even though he has it not, while Criqueboeuf's riders are near. And whatever you be, you are not a wise man, my lord."

He pulled down onions from the string which hung above him and offered them to Silvain with a hunch of rye bread.

"It is a hard world for good Christians. But there is a runlet of cider behind you. Breathe deep and put your mouth to the spigot and thank God for all."

"Health to you, brother," Silvain drank. "Whoever you are, you are no churl."

"I? All Normandy knows me. I am Thibaut, the Frank archer of Mère Eglise who keep the road for honest folk. But what are you, my lord? That is the riddle, said the monkey to the man."

"Good faith, no riddle. I am my father's son. I am Silvain de St. Lo. What, you have heard how the king drove my father from St. Lo and gave it to a knight of Touraine? Then my father rode with the Duke of Burgundy and I was his squire. But he died in his bed, poor soul. He had no fortune ever. So this he left me, to win back the honor of St. Lo and the pride of the name. And now King Louis who despoiled us has gone down to hell, and here am I."

"Quoth the mouse to the new cat, as he came to her kitchen. What, would you trudge to St. Lo one naked man and pull Sir Arnaud out with your hands?"

"Not I, brother," Silvain smiled. "For I will go riding and in armor and——"

"And with a good sword," Thibaut made a grimace. "Pray, my lord, did you pass a walnut-tree on your way?"

"I saw the fruit. Have courage, brother. I do not die."

"But I do," said Thibaut. "Do you know what those pretty men did, messire? They made a noise when Criqueboeuf took their land. He dies soon and dies hard who troubles the peace of the *seigneurs*."

Silvain smiled.

"It may be that I shall find time to speak with M. de Criqueboeuf," he said softly.

"Now St. Luke heal your poor head! Would you eat up every lord in Normandy?"

"Dear friend, I am no hungry man. No, faith, I would quarrel with none, now that King Louis is in hell, saving Sir Arnaud the Tourangeois who holds what is mine. For the rest, I do desire their good will and kindness."

"Do I not show it them?" says Thibaut, rubbing his head where was sprung up a bruise the size of a plum.

"Nay, I have it here," Silvain touched the sword. "Brother, I stand your debtor. But see how I pay. Go tell Sir Arnaud who has come against him that he may hang me in good time and pay you the butcher's price. Or ride with me and I will find you fortune. Choose, brother. You shall not say I left you poor."

"Now I know you are mad, my lord. For no man ever wanted me with him in all my days. By the sweet lips of Our Lady, I will not deny you. It is the fools that Heaven loves and if you lead and I come after there is folly enough to please all the saints."

"Amen, so be it," Silvain laughed.

Something in this manner Silvain and Thibaut set out to conquer the world. Whereat men wondered, then and after: for they said that Thibaut once ran from a scarecrow when it would not answer his challenge, and none but Silvain ever thought him a man for a desperate venture.

He was a long bag of bones; he looked a beggar of the highway with his stoop and his shuffle and the twists of that dark face which was never shaven nor bearded; he had a beggar's shrewd eye for men. Not the fellow, they said, to join in a boy's wild dash at fortune. And whether he ever knew Silvain in this world is doubted yet.

But wherever they are, it is sure that Silvain has chosen to be with him. He would never be responsible, Silvain of the far gaze.



THERE was a confusion of coming and going in France. Since King Louis, whom all men feared, was dead and a child reigned, some hurried to court, some to their castles to snatch new advantage. The highways were busy with men-at-arms seeking masters who would pay in cash or plunder, and knights in quest of fighting. Silvain and Thibaut, going afoot, were nothing accounted of on the Paris road, but when they came into Fleury Silvain stopped by the best inn.

"This may serve for a night, brother," he said looking lordly at the big fellows who lolled and drank.

"Are you made of money? It is silver there for a salt herring. Come, old Berthe the hen wife will give us a dish of chitterlings and clean straw and——"

Silvain strode into the inn saluting the men at their liquor graciously.

"God bless your house, good man," says he to the landlord, who stood agape trying to reconcile his poor clothes with his manner. "Give us what you have and let it come quickly," and he sat himself down at the head of the table.

The landlord began to talk.

"Your best will serve, friend." Silvain waved his hand and pulled out a book of the life of Our Lady and began to look at the paintings in it. Thibaut slunk into the kitchen.

The food was a bowl of Caen tripe. At the smell of it the men at arms came boisterously to table. Silvain helped himself and pushed the bowl on.

"Good appetite, friends," he smiled.

"Who set this puppet at the top of the table?" one of them cried, a lusty red fellow.

Silvain who was asking for a flask of white wine of Touraine did not choose to hear.

"I say, my lady's page, who gave you first dip?"

He flung a pellet of bread.

"Why friend, there is no first nor last here," says Silvain gently. "We are all equal at our meat."

"You whelp, do you count yourself as good as a man that bears arms?"

"But you lack courtesy. You would make me boast, good friend."

"Hear him! Boast, quotha! Bark, puppy, and I'll whip you."

"My friend, I have heard enough of you. Fill your mouth and be still."

He lifted his cup.

"I wish you peace."

It did not arrive. The man started up in a splutter of oaths while his friends mocked them both.

"Let him take the air till his head be cool," said Silvain and went on eating.

The man came to him.

"By my belly, it carries a sword!" he cried. "What is the iron for, child?"

Silvain drank up his wine and wiped his mouth.

"Bear me witness all here, it is not I who sought this."

He stood up.

"Mark me, fellow, if I fight, I fight for all I have against all of yours and no way else."

He smiled.

"Ah, now you are cooler."

"All of yours! A naked man afoot!" the man jeered.

Silvain put his hand to his neck and drew out a knight's chain of gold.

"Naked am I, fellow? Come take my life and this is yours. What stake have you?"

One of his companions plucked the man's sleeve.

"You ride blind, Bertrand, this is no cub."

But he was shaken off. Bertrand had his eyes on the massy gold links.

"Body of —, I will match you for it, horse and mail and all."

"You have said," Silvain turned to the others. "Pray do us honor, friends. Lead on, messire."

He waved Bertrand to the door.

Out in the cool evening wind they stood against each other. The red Bertrand settled his helmet and wetted his sword hand. He was a big fellow but young enough to be swift. He had a black breast plate and beneath it a coat of chain mail hung guarding half his thighs. Silvain threw his cap away and tossed back his fair hair and looked to the little company of Bertrand's friends.

"Give us the word, my lords."

They clustered together muttering, laying

wagers how soon Bertand would get a stroke home, how many blows the youngling would stand.

"By St. Denis, it is no match. Give the child a helm, Bertrand," one of them cried.

"Good thanks, friend. Our match is made," Silvain smiled. "At your pleasure."

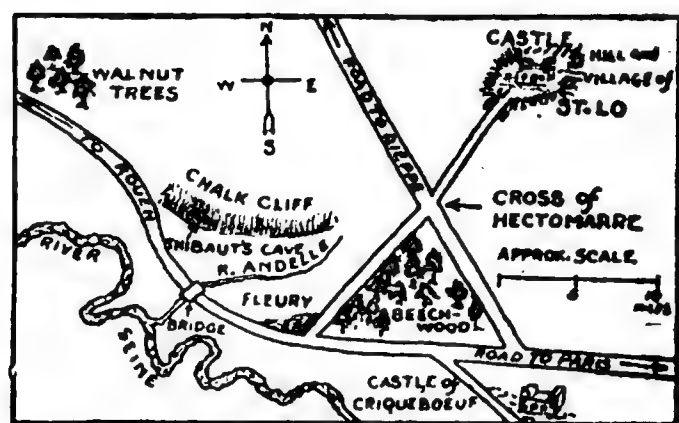
"He fights naked. He said it."

Bertrand made his sword whistle.

"Fight then and win who can. Go!"

As the word was shouted Thibaut slunk out of the inn, huddled and cringing, gnawing a ham bone.

Bertrand stood fast cutting figures in the air with his sword. Silvain moved



round him and he swung on his heel and grinned.

"Snap, puppy, snap," he said.

Silvain made a feint at his face and as he came on guard sprang back and stooping to make the most of his reach swept a cut at the man's legs. Bertrand gave ground and beat the blade down and it glanced off the mail coat and along the thigh with no weight in the blow but scraping.

"Body of —, a hit, a hit!" one of the wagers cried out.

"He has it!" Thibaut howled. "See his blood."

"Go in, Bertrand," his fellows called. "Head of St. John, go in. Or he'll ride your horse yet."

And swearing, Bertrand went in. Stroke upon stroke beat at Silvain's bare head. He took them on his sword but it was only anvil to the hammer of Bertrand's blade, and the fury, the sheer weight of the blows bore him down, his knees bent, he stumbled. Then while he seemed to fall, he sprang aside and was gone and Bertrand struck the air and staggered forward. As he went by Silvain rose to his full height and crashed a stroke on the unguarded helm. Bertrand

met the ground breast and face and where he fell he lay.

Silvain tossed back his hair and turned to the man's friends.

"Is he down, my lords?" he said.

He came to the still body and stood over it, his sword on the neck.

"A beaten man he is. Do not strike," one said.

And another—

"By my faith, you are a knight-at-arms."

Thibaut ran in and began to loose the man's breast-plate. Silvain picked up the sword and tried its balance.

"It is worth a better man," he said. "Take it, friend," and he laid it to Thibaut's hand. "Nay, leave him his helm and his coat. I would flay no man."

He put on the black breast-plate, he took the purse from the man's belt and weighed it in his hand.

"His horse should be heavier," he smiled and turned away.

"By my faith, you find fortune easily," a man growled.

"Why, so I do," Silvain smiled. "Would you do so, friend?"

But none of them challenged him.

"And fortune I find for all that follow me. Go, look to your fellow. He is a brave man of his hands. And when he asks what struck him, tell him that it was one Silvain, a lonely man. God be with you, my children. Who would ride with me, may find me tomorrow about this time at the Cross of Hectomarre."

He went into the inn calling to the landlord.

"Good fellow, there is here a man who who has done himself a hurt. Care for him well."

He felt in Bertrand's purse.

"Here is money for him. Let him lack nothing."

"And whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay you," Thibaut whined. "That is scripture, fellow. And my master's name is Sir Silvain the Samaritan."

Then they went out and saddled Bertrand's horse and Silvain rode away with Thibaut trudging at his stirrup. But Thibaut looked often behind him.

"Have done with that, brother!" Silvain turned the head round. "A man who looks over his shoulder I can not live with."

"Nor without, my lord, in your trade.

When these honest fellows think of it, they may seek to win your winnings again."

"They may: and therefore we vanish, lest they be tempted against their strength. But I believe they will not. For I gave them hope to feed on."

Thibaut chuckled.

"And if they go to the Cross of Hectomarre they will find neither breast-plate nor horse. Hope is a good servant and a bad master, as the wench said when she took the man's presents and married his friend."

"Rogue, I make no tryst to break it. If they seek me, they will find me."

Thibaut drew off. Thibaut bowed low.

"My lord, I have done you a wrong," he said. "I began to think you were not mad."

"Then you began to come to your senses. Good faith, there is no madness in me. I am as cold and cunning as King Louis. I have my kingdom to make. I know what I want and I count what I do."

"Oh, you see far, you see far." Thibaut looked up at him. "Do you see near?"

"I see bed and fodder. Come, it is time. There is work for tomorrow."

He turned his horse into a beech-wood and rode on through the gloom to the shimmer of twilight in a glade where there was grass for the horse. There on the beech leaves he said his prayers and slept. And Thibaut watched him a while and stole off to rob a hen roost.



WHEN they had made a breakfast of roast eggs they took the road again.

"Whither now, my fair lord?" says Thibaut. "To the field where the rainbow ends?"

"To the land of fair honor, brother."

Thibaut twisted his face.

"Will there be any more purses on the road?" he said: but said it to himself, Silvain looked so noble a master against the morning sun.

And as the day went by he was the more puzzled. The road had many travelers still, now that Silvain was on horseback he could hold his own among them, but he was meek. He let himself be thrust into the ruts, he stared at knights and men-at-arms like a wondering boy, and having gone some way, he halted and turned and rode back. When this was done yet again Thibaut came to him with tongue hanging out.

"Please you, my lord, I have no tail," he

said. "Therefore I take no pleasure to run after it. I grow dizzy with all this turning."

"Then lie down and scratch, friend. I know what I do."

Upon the third return, they met a knight and his squire riding abreast at a round pace. The squire carried the lance and shield, the knight had his helmet at the saddle, but he was a glitter of steel from neck to toe, in plates that overlapped and roundels, nobly armored.

He rode a big Norman charger and needed it, for he sat tall in the saddle and yet had length of leg like Silvain. He took the crown of the causeway as by right but so did Silvain, and when the squire shouted him out of the way, spurred his horse. The squire checked to draw aside lest his master should be jostled and Silvain, heavier man on heavier horse, crashed into him and flinging squire upon knight sent both reeling in disorder off the road.

"By my faith, you are no gentle horsemen."

Silvain reined up to watch them, hand on hip.

"Hard heel will not mend heavy hand, messire."

"Go beat me the knave, Henriot," the knight cried.

"Oh, a wise knight. He fights by proxy," Silvain laughed. "Come, child and be his whipping-boy," and he drew his sword.

"Bones of St. Denis, give me the lance."

The knight turned and set his horse going to ride Silvain down.

"Good faith, here is a knightly deed. A brave knight; oh, and a wise, wise knight," Silvain said, but he too charged.

The lance was aimed at his breast. He made his horse swerve as they met, he leaned far out of the saddle and, when the point slid by him, rose in his stirrups and struck a back-hand blow. It came with all the weight of the charge, and the knight went over his horse's tail headlong.

Silvain leaped from the saddle upon him, but he was in no haste to be up. Blood was coming from his mouth and his nose and he raised himself on his elbow and groaned, looking dully about him.

The squire cried out his horror and rode at Silvain, but was encumbered by Thibaut, who clung to him, leg and sword arm, and pulled him out of the saddle and rolled with him in the dust.

"The boy is a good boy," Silvain smiled. "But I think this fight is fought. How say you, sir?"

He put his point to the man's neck.

"Do you yield yourself?"

"To a nameless man? Not I, by my faith."

"It is well said. You will die then?"

The knight dashed the blood from his face.

"Do your pleasure," he said sullenly.

"You choose well."

Silvain lowered his point.

"Oh, sir, be content. You have lost no honor this day. I am Silvain de St. Lo."

After a moment the knight cried out.

"By the blood of St. John, it can not be."

"What is, is," Silvain smiled. "And you, who blazon the golden stag of Morson, I think you may yield to the lord of St. Lo."

"I am Artus de Morson," the man scowled at him, and then with an oath, looked all ways for help.

There was no help in his squire. The lank Thibaut had wound himself about the lad's body and disarmed him and was mounted on his horse catching the other two. The road was empty else.

"I yield myself," he muttered.

Silvain put up his sword.

"I must hold you to ransom, Sir Artus."

"By my faith, you will be paid," Sir Artus cried. "I ride with Monseigneur de Criqueboeuf. He will do me right."

"What, is he still alive? But you shall not need him. You shall go free for your arms and your horse. Pray you, let your squire serve you."

Then Silvain put on his armor as it was stripped from him and took his lance and his shield and mounted his horse and with Thibaut wearing the breast plate and riding the horse of the first fight, they made speed. And after them followed slowly Sir Artus on his squire's horse and the squire afoot.

But Thibaut shook his dark head.

"Good my lord, you are too fast for me, as the slug said when the caterpillar bade him be a butterfly. You went naked and afoot yesterday and by night you were a man-at-arms and today you ride a knight. St. Tringan watch over me, what will you be tomorrow?"

"Myself, friend."

"Pray you, will you know yourself when you find yourself?"

"What man, do you fear for me? I shall

not fail my fortune." They rode on and Silvain was busy scraping the stag's head from the shield of Sir Artus.

"Aye," said Thibaut, "but you will not wipe him out so. He has taken his grudge down the road to Criqueboeuf."

"You will look over your shoulder, will you?"

Silvain poked his knife into the man's arm.

"Nay, God speed him, I have a mind to speak with M. de Criqueboeuf."

Thibaut grimaced, wriggling his arm.

"If I look behind, do you look before," he said. "Whither are we going, my lord, that we go so gay?"

"Why, to the Cross of Hectomarre," Silvain laughed.

"Oh Mary our Mother!" Thibaut groaned. "It is a wild life with you, as the hen said to the fox when he ran with her into a trap."

And the nearer they came to Hectomarre the farther he fell behind.

The men-at-arms had taken up the challenge. They guarded the cross roads on either side, two of them mounted on watch, the others lying by their horses. But when Silvain came riding alone, in a knight's armor, his face hidden in his helmet, they did not know him and let him go by. He turned then; he put up his vizor.

"Are we all here?" he smiled.

There was shouting.

"By my bones, he has come! It is the lad of the inn. Who the —— is your armorer?"

And they got to horse, drawing up against him.

Silvain counted them off with his gauntleted hand, one, two, up to eight.

"A good company, by the grace of God. How say you of me?"

"Let us come to it," one cried and another. "It is not only you that can strip a man."

"Surely no," Silvain smiled. "Eight upon one should do it, though some go down. Forward then. Who comes first?"

No man was eager to lead. They muttered among themselves till one swore:

"By the head of St. John, he has kept his tryst. He did not bid us here to flay him. What have you for us, my lord, that you come to seek us?"

"Why, now you speak like men. I have a rich adventure. I am Silvain de St. Lo and I ride to win my heritage. If you ride

with me you shall have gallant work to do and win fair fortune. Who lays his life on mine?"

"By St. Denis, it is I will venture," one man cried. "I like your luck, my lord."

And another said:

"What is to do then? There is a king's man in St. Lo."

"And the king is dead. Sir Arnaud de Fontaines is lord of my lands and holds my castle of St. Lo. I go to reason with him. Thus we go. Tomorrow in the evening I come to the castle a traveler benighted and ask a night's lodging. So do you all, but one by one and each long after other. And when we are in, I will speak with Sir Arnaud and by the grace of God I will show him that his king is dead."

He bared his hand and held it out.

"Who is man of mine?"

There was not one but took it.

"Forward then! Go each his own way."

"To the ——," said a sepulchral voice behind him as they rode off.

Thibaut came up in the shadows.

"This will be a merry meeting, as the old carp said when he saw the dragnet coming down the pond."

"Go hide in your hole then. I take no man against his will."

"Do you not?" Thibaut twisted his mouth. "I come, I come. And God He knows I fear."



THE castle of St. Lo stood alone on a hill of sand and sandstone, as though the hill itself rose into brown turrets, which in the gloaming mingled with the sky. Riding through the little cluster of houses at the foot, where the herdsman and ploughmen of the seigneur lodged, Silvain and Thibaut climbed the steep to the main gate. There on the iron barred oak hung a horn and Thibaut blew a blast.

They were challenged from the gate-house tower, they declared themselves, and were let in. There was no lack of courtesy, but the lord of St. Lo seemed to live humbly, Thibaut must look to the horses himself. When Silvain came to the hall he found no one in it and the tables bare and a dying fire. His men coming in one by one stared hard and made long faces. They kept to their orders, they would not know one another or Silvain, but with a grin at him.

"Here is poor cheer, sir knight," one said.

"Friend, you are churlish," says Silvain

gently. "Blame no man's meat till you have eaten it."

"As the forester said when the wolf went round the meat in the trap," Thibaut muttered.

But there began a scurry as though the seneschal had but just thought of supper and soon there was meat and drink enough. An old steward in a black gown and a silver chain came in and led Silvain to a seat at the high table and set the others below the salt, and a dozen men-at-arms clattered in to join them and a press of servants. Still there was room to spare and at the high table Silvain sat alone. The steward carved for him.

"Why, good friend, let me wait for your lord and his lady."

The steward said that monseigneur was abroad and Dame Alys kept her bower.

"By my faith, I am an unlucky guest."

The steward must endeavor that he should not think so—and indeed was excellently hospitable, but a silent man.

Silvain, watching the lower table, saw some constraint there, too. His men were plied with food and drink but they made nothing of talking. The retainers of Sir Arnaud had thoughts of their own and they finished their supper in quick time nor stayed for drinking. Silvain was left with his own men and they looked at him queerly.

"No more wine, my lord?" the old steward hovered over him.

Silvain stood up.

"You have made me too welcome, friend. No more this night. I hope I may drink a cup with your lord in the morning."

The steward said nothing. He bowed and took candles and led the way out.

"Good rest, good fellows," Silvain called to his men.

For Silvain, who came as a knight, there was a room to sleep in. His men lay down in the hall. After a while to that little turret room came Thibaut, wriggling his long body.

"What do you know, my lord?" he grinned. "For no man else knows anything. This is true that they say, Sir Arnaud is not in the castle. He rode out in the morning and his good wife watches for him and he does not come. What is to do?"

"Sleep, brother," Silvain said. "Sleep while you may. For I see a long waking."

And he fell asleep while Thibaut muttered and tossed on the floor by his side.



WHEN the sun cast a bar of light through the narrow window Silvain awoke and said his prayers and put on his armor. Through the clank of it came the blast of a horn. He thrust Thibaut aside and ran to the battlements.

At the foot of the hill was halted a company of men-at-arms, others were climbing to the castle, there were some three or four at the gate.

"By my faith, it is the red bull's head," Silvain laughed and ran along the wall.

From the gate-house tower the watch challenged—

"Who comes to St. Lo?"

"The Baron de Criqueboeuf is here. Open your gate."

There was no answer. But Silvain heard a medley of voices and hurrying feet. A woman came out upon the ramparts by the gate. He saw her face white in the sunshine.

"What do you seek at St. Lo, my lord?" she cried.

A little man moved apart from the others below and looked up and laughed.

"Ha, Dame Alys, are you waking so early? Why, it was a lonely night for you. Open to me. I have news of your sweet master."

"Send your men down the hill, my lord, and the gate shall open for you."

"No, pretty one. It opens for me and all of mine. Who denies me? There is no lord in St. Lo. I have Sir Arnaud fast in my hold. What, would you kill your true love? Open your gates to me or he dies for it. By the head of —, if I must fight my way in I will not spare him, no, nor your own fair body nor any flesh in St. Lo."

"And I—I will hold my lord's castle against you and all your power."

"Then Sir Arnaud has seen his last of light."

"I will hold for his honor till I die."

"Odo de Criqueboeuf!" Silvain called in his gentle voice. "Messire Odo!"

He leaned over the battlements, his fair hair blowing in the wind.

"Alas, I must tell you that you lie. The Lord of St. Lo is not in Criqueboeuf. He is here, by God's grace."

The lady turned and shaded her eyes to look at him and Criqueboeuf ran aside to see him better.

"Yes, look well! There is a lord in St. Lo, for I am he. I am Silvain de St. Lo,

messire. It is in my mind that you have done a fool's deed, little man, and a base folly. I do not like you upon my hill."

He ran along the wall and took an arbalest from a man-at-arms and loosed the bolt at Criqueboeuf. It struck that little lord full, but he was in armor of proof and, though he staggered, he went safe off, shouting to his men below.

Dame Alys also was calling.

"Bring me that knight! Who watches on the eastern wall? Bring me that knight, I say."

But Silvain was away before they could lay hands on him and he came to her and bowed low. She stood tall with her dark hair tied in a crescent above her head and her flowing blue robe was borne back by the wind on a noble form. The white face was stern and proud in her fear.

"Who are you that mock my lord? What brought you here in this hour?"

"I am what I say I am, Silvain de St. Lo. I am come for my own. This hour I did not choose, but I am glad that it has found me here, lady."

"If you are Silvain de St. Lo you are a banished man. By Our Lady, you shall win nothing by this trick. If my lord were here he would send you in chains to the king."

Silvain smiled at her.

"When he is here, he shall do his endeavor. But this day the road is barred. Look, lady."

Criqueboeuf's men are marching afoot up the hill.

"It is you that have done this," she cried. "You have given my lord to death."

"Not I, by my faith, I think I have won his life, Messire de Criqueboeuf will not kill him hastily while another man is lord in St. Lo."

She was startled.

"Dame Alys, we trifle with the time. The little man will kill us all if we stay quarreling. Come, I put my hands between your hands. I will be your true servant till we are quit of Criqueboeuf. Ah, you may trust me. My honor is the honor of St. Lo."

She looked at him strangely. A child's voice called her "Mother, mother," a little girl stumbled up the winding stair, saw him and hid her face in Dame Alys' gown.

Silvain took the child's hand and kissed it, and ran off calling to Thibaut and

his men. He led them to the gate-house tower where already the old steward had gathered most of the castle's men, a gloomy company. For a score of their fellows had ridden out with Sir Arnaud and must be broken. And they had no hope of better fortune, so few they were to hold off Criqueboeuf's power. Silvain came to them boisterously.

"Good faith, the little man shall dance this day! And a merry measure. The Lord is a man of war but not so the Lord of Criqueboeuf. Come up, little man, come up and we will show you a thing. By the bones of St. Denis, we could hold out here against all the power of Normandy. And he brings us a tail of a poor hundred. His tail will be down this night."

While he talked he was posting men with arbalests here and there, sending others for more bolts, for stones, for wood and water.

Criqueboeuf's men toiled up the hill in close column, for the path was narrow.

"Shoot roundly together, brothers," Silvain cried. "Shoot high."

The volley of bolts was loosed and struck gaps in the array, for the men-at-arms had no vizors to their helmets and only the front ranks bore shields and not every breastplate was proof. Still they pressed on, and though the arbalests were swiftly worked and took more toll to the walls, they came. Then, holding their shields above their heads to make an iron roof, the front ranks began to patter at the gate.

Silvain and his men flung down stones upon them and broke up their roof and drove them back and they lay down on the hillside while their fellows climbed about the rocky base of the castle wall looking for some weak place. None they found and the storming party formed again and came at the gate with their axes. Then Silvain poured down upon the roof of shields cauldrons of boiling water and that assault was broken into a wild flight down the hill.

Then M. de Criqueboeuf was seen a furious little man and his voice rose and fell. He set them in some order and marched them off and Silvain's men sent a cheer after him and crowded down the winding stair calling for dinner. But the old steward looked at Silvain.

"The end of this is not yet, my lord," he said.

"I abide to the end," said Silvain. "Go down. I keep watch in St. Lo."

So he was left alone on the tower and while he watched there came to him a woman with a pasty on a silver dish and a flagon of Touraine wine.

"This from my lady, sir knight."

"I kiss her hands and her feet," Sylvain said, but while he ate his eyes searched into the cluster of houses under the hill.

In a while he saw muster and movement and shouted, "On guard, on guard," and his men came up merrily.

But Criqueboeuf had a new tactic. Half-way up the path his front ranks opened out and spread along the hillside and it was seen they were bowmen. So they worked their way up, scattered, offering no good mark, till they wound their arbalests and shot wherever they saw head or body.

While this storm of bolts searched the walls, other men brought forward ladders here and there and set them up. Sylvain must needs scatter his main guard and they ran where danger was, casting the ladders off, and once or twice beating down men who made a lodgment.

The fight went hard for the cross-bow bolts found them as they ran along the walls and though they made far greater havoc of the storming parties they could spare none of their side and Criqueboeuf's men came on doggedly again and again. And when the day was waning and they were scattered and weary Criqueboeuf brought his shields up the hill at a run. The axes were beating on the gate before Sylvain won back to the tower. He hurled down stones and broke the guard of shields, still those who were left plied their axes. His men came back in time to bring the boiling cauldrons and again the assault fled writhing and cursing. But in that moment he heard a cry for help. Away on the western wall where the hill was steepest, where no attack had been, Criqueboeuf's men had a ladder up and already they were on the rampart. A blue sleeve waved wildly from a turret, Dame Alys cried his name.

"Forward, forward. It is the sword's turn now," he cried and charged along the wall.

The rush of his coming bore him into the midst of the black breast-plates. One man went down into the castle-yard, another out upon the hillside. Blow upon blow he cleared a space about him and fought his way to the ladder. It was dark with men, and others were running up the

hillside to climb, and at the foot Criqueboeuf was yelling for more ladders.

Sylvain caught at the top rungs and heaved; he could not stir it, so heavy it was with men; it shook and cracked, and topmost man cut at his hands: still he labored with it, moved it a little way, thrust it out and suddenly the weight upon it helped him and bore it away and ladder and man went crashing down the hillside. He staggered back panting and snatched his sword again. But there was no need. His men had dealt with those who were on the wall.

He heard Criqueboeuf's thin voice calling for another assault, saw him rush hither and thither pulling and striking men who would not be rallied. The broken array flowed down the hill in many streams.

But on the walls of the castle they were merry.

"Ha, little man, have you had your fall?" one cried and another. "We have a knight to our captain, we."

"That is a true word, my lord," the old steward said, coming to Sylvain's side. "Have you no hurt?"

Sylvain shook his head. His eyes were searching the retreat.

"We may thank God."

"So ends this day," Thibaut said. "But there is another tomorrow. Let us eat, drink and be merry."

"Give them good cheer, friend," Sylvain said. "Go down, go down."

But he still stood looking through the twilight.

Thibaut lingered by him.

"What do you lack, my lord?"

"I keep the first watch. Go, find me a cloak, friend."

And he stayed there watching till the night was dark.

When he went into the hall he found Dame Alys in her place at the high table.

"This is kind honor, lady," he bowed.

"I think my lord would bid me be here," she said; and her eyes met his sternly.

A sedulous care for his needs, a cold dignity proclaimed that he was only a guest and of no account. Sylvain was frugal and quick.

A while after, when he had made the rounds, he went out at the postern-gate alone. He was swathed in his cloak, but he moved lightly, for he wore no armor and coming round the hill picked his way about

the bivouac of Criqueboeuf's men and into the little village. From house to house he stole in the dark till he made sure of that one which he sought. Then he drew off and struck light in a tinder-box, covering it with his cloak. Choosing that of the new stacks which was nearest the house, he tore sheaves from it and put them nearer still and set all on fire.

White smoke rose and flame and the wattled walls began to smolder, there was crying within and a little man ran out. Him Silvain struck down and muffling him in the cloak flung him over his shoulder and made off where the dark was darker for the glare of the fire.

In this manner Monseigneur de Criqueboeuf entered the castle of St. Lo.

The old steward held the postern open. Silvain flung the little man in, since there was no room for two in the narrow doorway and followed and set his foot upon him and breathed hard and dashed the sweat from his face.

"God's grace, my lord, what is this you bring?"

The old man held his lantern high. Criqueboeuf had wriggled his head out of the cloak and looked up at them through dishevelled hair, an anxious man.

"Ay, sir," Silvain said. "What are you that lie there?"

"I am Odo de Criqueboeuf. You know it well."

"Indeed I had thought of it. Pray you, Sir Odo, what have you to do here in our castle of St. Lo?"

"I am your prisoner this night."

Silvain took his foot from the little man's chest and bowed.

"Sir, it is my great good fortune. I shall study to deserve it. Pray you, let me lead you to Dame Alys. Go before, friend."

He turned to the steward.

"Say to my lady that Sir Odo de Criqueboeuf craves her grace."

Criqueboeuf, having found his feet and made sure that all of him was still hale, smiled at him.

"You are gallant, sir."

And he followed the lantern. He conceived that he understood the matter.

They had to wait at my lady's door. When she called them in she had put on a loose golden gown, and in a plait on either side her black hair came upon it to fall across her bosom,

"Dame Alys, I bring you Monseigneur de Criqueboeuf who is prisoner in St. Lo—" Silvain began, but she would not hear him out.

She came at Criqueboeuf crying:

"What grace should you have? What mercy? Where is my lord?"

It became clear to Criqueboeuf that he had mistaken her.

Silvain came between them.

"This knight has yielded himself," he said gently.

"He shall yield me my lord alive or he shall hang. Speak, fellow! He dares not speak! How is it with my lord? Speak true, lies shall not help you now."

"But let me speak then," the little man smiled. "It is with Sir Arnaud as it is with me. He lies a prisoner in Criqueboeuf as I in St. Lo and has no more hurt than I. But there is this of my part, I have your castle beleaguered and I think you have no men before Criqueboeuf."

"I pray you, my lord, do you count your men will have better fortune without you?" said Silvain gently. "For it is in my mind that with you they have had none."

Criqueboeuf turned on him.

"Why, sir, I count that if my men see me not in the morning, it will go very hard with Sir Arnaud."

"Alas, I have a dull wit," Silvain sighed. "I can not tell how that shall serve you. For what ransom will you pay then, my lord?"

"His life for it," Dame Alys cried.

"Surely his life for it," said Silvain gently. "Yet what is that worth?"

"By St. Ouen, speak, one of you, not both. Who is it that talks with me? I am your prisoner, sir. What would you have of me?"

"By my faith, I would have a knight's ransom. Five hundred gold crowns is all too little for the lord of Criqueboeuf."

That lord made a wry face.

"I must strip myself bare."

"I dare not hold you cheap, my lord," Silvain bowed.

"Well, let me write."

He made for the table.

"Not so."

Dame Alys thrust him back and turned upon Silvain.

"Out on you, you are false. You sell my lord's life."

Criqueboeuf laughed.

"He had spoken and as I think he is lord in St. Lo."

"Not while I live or child of mine."

"Why, he may contrive for that, lady."

"Pray you write, my lord."

Silvain set pen and paper.

"Five hundred gold crowns and Sir Arnaud safe at the castle gate."

Criqueboeuf drew back.

"—'s body, it is a cheat. I will not write. The ransom yes, not the man too."

"It is indeed yours to choose," said Silvain. "What is the man to me? If he live or die I am lord in St. Lo. And whether you die or live I will hold what is mine. Yet if you would live, my lord, write."

And Criqueboeuf sat and wrote while Silvain looked over the paper and prompted in his gentle voice. But when it was written and before it was sealed Dame Alys snatched the paper and read. Then she tossed it down on the table and looked long at Silvain and swept out.

 IN THE morning M. de Criqueboeuf was brought from the dungeon beneath the hall and set upon the ramparts and a trumpet called to his men.

When some one came running up the hill, "Monseigneur is here," Silvain shouted.

"Look well!"

They did look and cried the news and the rest hurried to see while Criqueboeuf swore at them and bade them send his squire to the gate.

"His squire alone," Silvain called, "no man else."

"You are a cautious knight," Criqueboeuf grinned at him.

"Oh, sir, I do not love to take life," said Silvain.

They went down to the gate and opened a wicket in it and when the squire came, a swart youth and heated, and saw Criqueboeuf he cried out—

"Good my lord, have you no hurt? I have men digging in the ashes yet. I—"

"You are a fool. Take this and ride to the castle and bid Roger do it and fail not."

"And the men, my lord?"

"The men rest here on their arms. Go."

"Haste, friend, haste," said Silvain. "You ride for your lord's life."

The squire looked into his keen eyes and fled.

"By St. Ouen, you are anxious," Criqueboeuf smiled.

"Why, sir, so I am. There is one in this castle will not spare you long," Silvain said and took him back to the dungeon under the hall.

Silvain was a great man to his men that day. They counted the ransom of M. de Criqueboeuf many times over and saw themselves serving a captain born for fortune. If he could contrive such a victory coming a lone knight, what would he find for them when he was lord of St. Lo? But Dame Alys walked the walls apart.

It was late when she saw dust on the road in the west, and stood at gaze and called the steward to her and pointed and talked to him eagerly, looking askance at Silvain. But Silvain had seen all before she saw it and his men were already saddling in the courtyard and to the gate-house tower he came with Thibaut carrying his helmet.

A trumpet sounded under the hill. Silvain shouted in answer.

"Bring what you bring to the turn of the path that I may see it."

Into sight came a little company, a man unarmed between two men-at-arms, Criqueboeuf's squire who bore a leather sack, and behind them Criqueboeuf's men gathered.

"Is that your lord, friend?" Silvain asked of one of the watch.

"It is he, good faith."

Then Silvain shouted—

"Halt there and see what I bring."

And he put on his helmet and ran down bidding Thibaut follow.

"Now God give you grace, my lord, what is there for a sane man to do here?" Thibaut groaned.

"To count the gold, brother," Silvain laughed and sent for Criqueboeuf.

That little lord came blithely to the gate.

"You are still lord in St. Lo then?" he grinned.

"By your favor. And there is your ransom."

He opened the wicket.

"If it please you, let your squire come bringing the man and the gold to the thorn bush there and you and I and my squire will go meet them."

Criqueboeuf looked out.

"It is three upon two," he said. "Well, I trust your honor."

He shouted the order to his men.

Then Silvain opened the gate and they three went out.

"Here is your ransom, Sir Arnaud,"

Silvain said, looking the man in the eye.

"Who are you, in God's name?"

Criqueboeuf laughed.

"Why, this is the lord of St. Lo."

"Silvain de St. Lo, I am."

"What devil's trick is this, Criqueboeuf?"

Sir Arnaud laid hands on him.

"Peace, peace. We are naked men both. Trick, by St. Ouen? No trick of mine that I pay five hundred crowns for it. Give him his gold, boy."

The squire gave the bag to Silvain who broke the seal and saw that there was gold and turned aside to Thibaut.

Sir Arnaud looked death at him.

Criqueboeuf smiled.

"Pray give us leave, Messire Silvain. For I think we are not your prisoners now."

He drew Sir Arnaud apart.

"Good faith, I can not tell what he is. This only I know that when I came to St. Lo to try this venture against you, the fellow was in your castle with your lady and gave out that he was the lord of St. Lo. And by St. Ouen, true I found it for he ruled all and served your lady well and she him with good will."

"Now I know that you lie, Criqueboeuf."

"By Our Lady of Evreux it is true. Peace, man. Look, you find him master of all."

He drew Sir Arnaud further away down the hill.

"And last night when he took me by a trick—oh, he is a strong man of his hands—he brought me to the castle and carried me up to your lady's chamber where she waited him in her bed gown and they two—Why, man, what should I gain by a lie? You shall find all the castle know of it when you go in."

"You are a very foul knave, Criqueboeuf."

Sir Arnaud turned away. Criqueboeuf held up his hand and cried "Bows, bows!" and ran.

From the foot of the hill his arbalests shot a flight of bolts. Silvain dashed after him, caught him and carrying him like a sack came close behind Sir Arnaud.

"Stoop low, sir, stoop low, and forward, in God's name."

Criqueboeuf's squire made at them crying—

"Treachery, treachery!"

"Why, brother, so it is," Thibaut said and clung to his legs and brought him down and picked up the gold and ran.

So shielded by a man's body and a man in armor Sir Arnaud came through the cross-bow bolts back to his castle. There at the gate Silvain flung M. de Criqueboeuf down and he did not rise again for he was shot through body and neck, a dying man. But Silvain ran on to his horse and mounted and crying, "Out! Out!" charged down the hill at the head of his men.

The arbalests shot while they came but would not wait the shock and the men-at-arms behind them taken unready and in disorder were broken and ridden down, and through the twilight Silvain's company chased them far.

He came back leading merry men. The castle gate opened to him and the old steward met him and said—

"Sir, my lord and my lady ask that you will honor them."

Silvain took off his helmet and was brought to Dame Alys' bower.

She sat beside her husband and her hand—was on his.

"I pray you be happy, lady," he said. "The riders of Criqueboeuf will trouble St. Lo no more."

"By the blood of — you are a brave knight and wise in arms!" Sir Arnaud cried.

But Dame Alys looked full on Silvain and though her face was grown gentle her eyes were cold.

"Why have you done all this?" she said.

"So it fell, lady, and I could do no other."

"For the honor of St. Lo?"

"You have said."

Her eyes were darker and she breathed deep. Then Sir Arnaud said slowly—

"Sir, it is in my heart that I have done you a great wrong."

But Silvain laughed.

"Good faith, my lord, your heart does not love me and I have no blame for it, I."

"You have saved my life and what I would love better and I——"

"It was my fortune."

"I pray you, sir," Dame Alys held out her hands to him, "why did you come to St. Lo?"

"I am Silvain de St. Lo."

"And I hold what was your father's," Sir Arnaud said, "and you came to win it again. And now you win my life for me and my wife and my child. Yes, you fight your fight nobly, my lord."

"By the heart of Our Lady, I have done as I could," Silvain cried. "What would you have of me?"

"What would we have?" Dame Alys echoed with wonder glowing in her eyes.

"—'s body, I am no churl," Sir Arnaud said. "What should a man give for life and love and honor? You have won all. It is you who are lord in St. Lo."

Then Silvain smiled.

"Not I, by my father's soul. Hear me, Sir Arnaud. I came to set myself against you and so I have and I go down this day. For you are a better knight than I. I came to win lands and fortune, but you hold honor dearer than fortune and lands. I came to take by arms, but you would give all away for the pride of your soul. By my faith, I can not stand against you, my lord. I must draw off and go my way. The honor of St. Lo is safer in your guard than mine."

He strode out before they could stay with him and came to Thibaut where he sat in that little room in the east wall. Master Thibaut had his hands deep in the gold and was talking to it.

"Come, brother, carry that now to Sir Arnaud," Silvain said.

Thibaut's dark face twisted in strange devices. He lifted a handful of gold and let it trickle back and kissed it.

"Fare you well," he said. "You go to a man that has wife and child."

He did up the bag.

"Good my lord madness, it is a cruel world for bachelors. The fathers, they have no mercy upon us."

Silvain marched him back to Sir Arnaud and Dame Alys who were deep in talk.

"Here is Criqueboeuf's ransom, my lord. I pray you of your grace spare something of it for those good fellows who came with me. They have fought not ill. And if you need men in St. Lo—"

Sir Arnaud thrust the bag away.

"This is none of mine, sir. Why what would you make me, that you would have me take that too?"

"Oh, sir, if it irks you, my fellows will

ease you," Silvain smiled and out he went.

He called his men about him where they sat drinking in the hall.

"Good fellows, I promised you a blithe adventure and fortune to win. We have been merry here in St. Lo and Sir Arnaud had no grudging hand."

"Sir Arnaud!" one of them said. "Who is lord in St. Lo?"

And another: "You were to win castle and lands. —'s body, you have won all this day." And another, "By my bones, you promised us service with the lord of St. Lo."

"If you ask, Sir Arnaud will not deny you, and he is Lord of St. Lo. But I go my way. Who follows me?"

"What, you give all up?" one cried and another. "The old lord has bought him off." And another, "What, follow a landless knight?"

Silvain turned from them and in the courtyard met Sir Arnaud seeking him.

"My men have chosen, sir," Silvain said before he could speak. "I pray your grace for them. They fight well and are trusty on a hard day. Give me leave, now, it grows late."

"Good faith, man, you will not end it so. You—"

"Oh, my lord, I have no comfort to be here in St. Lo," Silvain said. "Forgive me when I am gone."

And he found his horse and mounted and rode out alone.

A little way down the hill he turned and looked back a last time through the gloaming at the castle of his name. He saw a woman stand on the walls watching him and a child.

Then Thibaut rode out after him.

"What brother, you follow a man that has lost?" Silvain said gently.

And Thibaut groaned—

"Alas, my lord and alas, for that I was born, as the donkey said when he heard his voice."



The FISH- NETS of QUOIPA- MOIRU

A Complete
by Novelette
GORDON
MAC CREAGH



Author of "The Rope of Pedro Mendez," "The Crawling Script," etc.

THEY were quite wonderful nets really—considering all things; handmade out of hand-spun llama wool and every detail of their construction accomplished by Quoipa himself under difficulties every bit as great as the Israelites labored under when they had to make their bricks without straw.

Quoipa was an Aymará Indian, and his condition of life was not very much better than that of those same Israelites. To begin with, the climate was against him. He lived in that ghastly tableland between the Cordillera del Mar and the Cordillera real, the *altiplano* of the Andes, stretching from Peru, through Bolivia, to Chile—once the bed of an enormous lake; now a vast barren plateau, two hundred miles wide and thirteen thousand chill feet up in the air, with the lake shrunken to a paltry hundred and twenty miles in length, half in Peru and half in Bolivia.

To go on, the rulers of the land—or at least certain of their representatives—were against him. For it was his ill fate to live in a portion of that *altiplano* which had fallen into the hands of political land-grabbers who exploited the dwellers upon their soil.

And finally, even his fellow Indians were against him. For of all that sullen, uncommunicative race, he belonged to the most isolated group, the fisherfolk of Lake Titicaca, landless nomads of that great inland sea, who had come least under the influence of the white invaders, and whom the land Indians, serfs of the soil, called *charaa-*

challhuappa, web-footed, a queer, scaly people apart.

Quoipa himself was probably more typically Inca than Aymará—though he himself had never heard even a legend of his mighty forebears. All that was lost, ruthlessly rooted out by the fierce zeal of the priests in their efforts to banish everything pagan. Only here and there a witch-doctor, hiding in secret places, retained memories of the lore that used to be.

So Quoipa knew nothing even of the existence of such a race as the *Incasayocca*. But he had the pronounced cheek-bones and slightly oblique eyes and wide mouth of the great stone god of Ollantantaybo, and his limbs were as short and as burly in proportion. The skin of his muscular torso appeared at a short distance to have the sheen of a rich brown velvet, but a closer inspection showed that it actually was a scaly sort of integument. Exposed to constant wet and then to the cutting winds of that thin air, it chapped in a maze of intricate channels and powdered off in myriad minute flakes.

His shoulders and neck where the poncho chafed were creased and furrowed like the neck of any other creature that toils beneath the yoke. His only other garments, in spite of his clammy occupation, were a pair of short, baggy pants, rotted and frayed out at knee height from permanent soaking, and a narrow-brimmed felt hat. Not a very merry life was Quoipa-Moiru's.

He would have been more comfortable even as a peon, a serf of the soil, like all the

land Indians; and a strong lad such as he might easily have indentured himself to one of the grafting *politicos*. But the spirit of his fathers glowed strongly in him, just as it glows in the heart of any one of his white brothers of a whaling family from Gloucester. He was a sailor by heredity, and he had, moreover, inherited the business from his father, Quoipa-Allamm.

Immersion in freezing water and drying in an icy hurricane clear off the snow masses of the Cordillera had one day proved too much for the old man's years and had smitten him with the fierce pneumonia of the high levels. In that rarefied atmosphere there could be but one outcome, and that as swift as the cholera of the low levels of that self-same parallel of latitude. He had just about time enough to gasp.

"My son is my son. Who I was he is. My business is his business. My house is his house."

And having thus settled his worldly affairs according to prescribed custom, he died, and his son changed his name from Quoipa the son of Allamm to Quoipa-Moiru and became a grown man, master of his own destiny.

The "business" had consisted of two bean-poles and a long, narrow double paddle. In a country thirteen thousand feet high, where no wood grows at all, what else could the owner of such assets be but a fisherman? All that was necessary besides were a boat and nets.

The boat was easy, even though there was no wood available. Quoipa cut bundles of the tall *tortora* reeds which grew in the shallows of the lake and bound them together into two great, fat, torpedo-shaped cigars, ten feet long apiece. These he lashed side by side; and presto! there was a boat as good as ever his father or his father's grandfather had had.

It weighed nearly a ton and it rotted within the year. But it had a great advantage over most boats in that it was quite unsinkable. The two bean-poles, thrust each into one of the cigars a little forward of amidships, and bound together at the top, formed a skeleton mast which supported a sail like a Japanese window-blind of *tortora* slats. When the wind was fair the craft plowed along as merrily as a water-logged derelict. When the wind failed out in the middle of the lake—which was forty miles wide—well, even a ton of floating debris

could be driven by a double paddle and a pair of very muscular arms—somewhere, sometime.

The nets were a more intricate problem. There was no market where wool for their manufacture could be bought, even if Quoipa had any money. For he lived in the little fishing village of Challa, which snuggled behind the ancient Sanctuary-of-the-Rock in the very sacred Island-of-the-Sun in the middle of that icy lake called Titicaca. Nobody would give him wool. For the land Indians, cultivators of the soil and herders of llamas, needed their wool for ponchos and blankets. True, he could trade in wool for fish. But in order to have fish it was first necessary to have nets.

The nets of Quoipa's father had been lost recently when he dragged the deep bottom at the base of the precipitous cliff upon which stood the sacred rock. They had caught in something hard and heavy, and the lines had just given way.

Mamu, the soothsayer of the rock, who was so old that he had forgotten his father's name, said angrily that such was no more than was to be expected; for the waters at the base of the cliff were *huaca*, tabu; and the angry spirits of the people of the old time who had been cast from the great slab of grooved diorite at the base of the rock lived in the deeps, servants of the *huaca*; and that these had held on to the nets and rent the lines.

The spirits were angry, he said, because certain of the poverty-stricken fisherfolk of Challa, seduced by money, had helped impious white men to dig up the ground around the ancient labyrinth temple behind the rock; and because some of these profaners had been known actually to touch the Sacred Rock without having been instantly killed by their hired slaves. So the spirits had shown their anger by killing Quoipa-Allamm who dragged the deeps below the rock. Let all the people beware, therefore. There were certain things *huaca* which must never come to light.

All this was very bewildering to Quoipa-Moiru. He knew, of course, from his boyhood that there were mysterious somethings connected with the ancient temple and its surrounding waters which must never be laid bare. All the fisherfolk knew that, though the land Indians said it was all rubbish—the good *padres* from Sorata had told them so. Yet Mamu the soothsayer

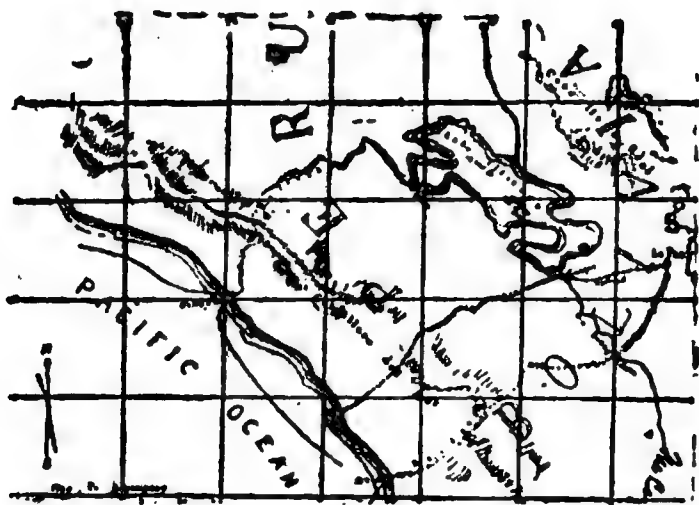
spoke angrily of the *padres* and insisted shrilly that they knew nothing at all. But he never seemed to be able to tell just what these *huaca* things were. He would just lower his eyes and complain that he was very old and that the chatterings of the young men wearied him and that he had forgotten.

And that was all the satisfaction that Quoipa-Moiru could ever get on the subject of the nets of Quoipa-Allamm.



YET his own need for nets was urgent. It was but an additional hardship in his already hard life that in order to have nets it was first necessary to have wool.

So Quoipa-Moiru went forth by stealth like a poacher of protected game and gathered his wool under difficulties. He made chilly night forays upon the stone corrals of the llama herders and snatched handfulls of their greasy coat from the live beasts, who squealed and spat green slime at him. The herdsman came out of their mud huts and stood at their doors, peering into the dark,



fearful of devils. Then with high-pitched quavering cries of "Ulu-ulu-ulu-ulu" to encourage each other they whirled their slings round their heads and fired jagged stones at the shadowy marauder. Unlike David of old, they reserved the smooth round ones only for the correcting of wilful llamas. For human or superhuman enemies jagged flints were much better.

Quoipa found these raids more exciting than profitable. So he reverted to the more tedious gathering up of the stray tufts that clung to the sparse low wind-blown *tiquilla* shrubs. Or again he would sit in the thin sunshine and patiently unravel a worn-out

blanket—part of his heritage—and would respin the yarn on a queer little bobbin which he twirled between his toes.

With these heterogeneous findings he made his nets, small-meshed and wonderfully strong; and thus equipped at last, he embarked full-fledged upon his profession, comforting himself with the thought that while he might be just a little bit ostracised by the land Indians as a sort of amphibious creature, he was also just a little bit feared, as being in closer touch with witch-craft than were his "civilized" compatriots who came more nearly under the influence of the good *padres*. And he had distinct cause for rejoicing in the thought that he was at least master of his own miserable toil and no serf, as were the landfolk who labored three days in every week for the owner of the soil upon which they lived. Not so very different from a sturdy Gloucesterman was Quoipa-Moiru in his point of view.

And then into his isolated speck of the world came the white man. He came upon the little steam-boat that runs—every now and then, when the engines happen to be willing—from the Peruvian port of Puno to Guaqui at the other end of the lake to connect with the Bolivian railroad to La Paz city. The little boat ran quite close in to the steep shores of the island, shot out a plank, landed the man with his little baggage and his two companions and snorted off on its way, leaving them to their own devices.

The white man was big and red-headed and bull-voiced. He was a scientist—he said so himself; and he had come up into this inhospitable land through the Peruvian port of Mollendo via Cuzco, where he had been studying the ruins of the ancient Inca capital. His companions were two almost-white men. They were, he said, his assistants, Peruvian scientists, who were anxious to study ancient ruins with him.

A swarthy, shifty-eyed couple. One of them had a scar, white against the sallow skin, which ran from his cheek-bone to the angle of his mouth. He was apparently the better scientist of the two; for he knew exactly what to do with Indians. He seized upon two of the nearest in the group who stood gaping at the strange visitation, cuffed them as a preliminary to understanding and made them carry the baggage to the very center of the sacred labyrinth,

where he paid them well with a kick apiece and told them to stand by for further orders. They stood, meek and expressionless, as was expected of all the Aymará of the *altiplano*.

The baggage was of the scantiest. A tent, the barest of necessities for food and a long, heavy package done up in sacking. No richly equipped scientific expedition, this. With a great deal of not very scientific swearing and a sufficiency of very scientific blows they made the two Indians understand how to set up the tent, and after that all the work seemed to devolve upon the white man, for the other two shivered in their cloaks and huddled themselves in the sunshine.

"*Carramba*," they swore in unison; and, "By the Sacred Pipe, what a frozen fiend's country is this, where the cold is always and where there is no wood to light a fire with! Mercy of — that we came at least in the season when this worthless sun is not lost behind the mists."

And, "Nails of the Saviour, was it not I who said so?" the man with the scar prided himself. "Give me belief, friends. It is I, Sanchez, who knew whereof I spoke when we took the map from that dying old fool."

Quoipa-Moiru, who was one of the favored Indians, spoke a little Spanish, as did a few others of the more intelligent fisherfolk. But not nearly enough to note that the speech of these *científicos* was the speech of the Mollendo water-front.

Then the scientist who knew all about Indians found time to recollect that he had no further use for the two who stood so obsequiously to heel. So he paid them off with another kick apiece and sent them off to rejoin their fellows, who watched from a distance with slow, bovine stolidity. After that he seemed to consider that he had contributed enough of scientific endeavor to the enterprise; for he retired within his cloak, swathed to the nose; only his two glittering eyes showing, and cursed the cold.

It was the more robust white man who unpacked the scanty cooking appliances and prepared a nondescript sort of a meal over a kerosine primus stove to the accompaniment of futile imprecations upon the other two who remained shivering within their wrappings. After which he prowled, as hungrily as if he had not fed at all, through the ruined labyrinth.



THE sacred place lay in the shadow of the Rock, a maze of passages and courts and massive walls. Vast blocks of granite, twenty feet by five square, pyramidal in size, but so carefully cut and fitted that they held through the ages without any cement, which was unknown to the ancient builders. Whether a temple, or living quarters for the priests and sacred virgins, or both, has never been determined. The field for research was immense.

The divine fire of scientific investigation spurred the red-headed man to energy. He nosed about the giant blocks of masonry and made measurements and stamped every now and then with a heavy foot upon the ground and listened with the cunning expression of a bear looking for honey in a hollow tree.

That, with small variation, seemed to be the program for the next few days. The two almost-white scientists, wrapped in their black Spanish cloaks, crouched in the sunshine upon a block of carved granite like a brace of ragged condors and watched with the same beady-eyed keenness as the great carrion birds that sailed immensely above them, while the red-white scientist prowled and rooted and grumbled like a huge brown bear. From a distance the fisherfolk watched all three, sullen, aloof and expressionless.

From above, the giant condors, almost as big as the black-cloaked figures, watched every least little movement of everything that moved with their everlasting vigilance and their telescopic eyes.

Their shadows, huge as silent aero-gliders under the sun, circled and crossed and recrossed over the ground like dark premonitions of evil. The Indians looked at them with superstitious divination and told one another—

"*Khamachi k'Inti amúthua pfayapita*. The birds of the Sun God prophesy food."

And they muttered in guttural agreement—

"Yes, the Sun Birds know all things."

There was truly something of foreboding in the endless circle and swoop of the great silent shadows. They must have got on the white man's nerves; for suddenly, on the second day, he leapt up from his prowling and shook his fists up at them in impotent rage and shrieked curses upon their

cold yellow eyes. Quoipa and his friends, watching, muttered to each other—

"They have marked down that one already."

The white man directed his wrath in a less futile direction, and his bull voice broke as he screamed at his companions, who brooded in their black wrappings for all the world like two of the great carrion birds come down to gloat.

"Why, by the most sacred name, can't you two *mestizos* come and be of some use here? You'd think I was the only prospector in the outfit."

At the bastard appellation the eyes of the man with the scar glittered as yellowly as a condor's. But he crawled down from his perch and came scowlingly to the other's assistance. From under his cloak he produced a paper upon which he kept a suspicious clutch, and together they pored over it and pointed along certain of the ruined walls and measured distances and presently planted a little stake in a certain spot.

"That paper," said the Indians to one another, "must be very sacred; for by virtue of it that little man holds ascendancy over the other two."

And so the study progressed for three more days. Quarrelling, arguing and snarling at one another, referring constantly to the paper of mystic power, the "scientists" planted sundry stakes on certain selected spots.

As the condors watched unceasingly, so watched the Indians. One or two, at least, always; distant, aloof and incurious.

Finally the preliminary survey was apparently concluded. Direct and more exciting action was the order. The long heavy package was unwrapped, and disclosed digging-tools. The nature of the study which had drawn this ill-assorted trio together became more apparent.

"I'll dig here," said the white man. "And you fellows take the next stake."

He was almost cordial with pleasurable anticipation, and forthwith he attacked the ground with powerful strokes which indicated more experience with a spade than was altogether proper for any true scientist. But digging was much too menial an occupation for half-breeds of the Mollendo water-front. The man with the scar stepped on to a huge, perfectly squared monolith and called authoritatively to the distant watching Indian.

There happened to be only one just then. It was Quoipa again. The rest had gone fishing. Quoipa should have been out fishing too. But it was not so long ago that he had received his little lecture on the sacred nature of the ancient labyrinth and the mingling of curiosity and resentment that fermented slowly in his mind was a powerful magnet. He came hesitatingly, half-distrustful, half-willing. Yet the lack of co-ordination between emotion and expression which is the heritage of all his people was extraordinarily apparent. His oblique eyes and wide mouth showed no more sign of his thoughts than the idol they resembled.

"Here, fellow, dig in this place," said the *mestizo*. "I will give you money."

Quoipa had seen money before, though he had never had any of his own, and greatly did he desire it. With money, if one could earn a great deal of it—say as much, possibly, as a dollar—one could buy enough wool all in a lump to make a whole dozen of nets without incurring the risk of another deep scar from a jagged sling-stone in one's back, such as Quoipa already had. One could even hire a skilled craftsman to make nets for one and thus increase one's business to a profitable enterprise with a single bound. Or, one might embark on a career of high finance, lending out nets to other less fortunate toilers of the deep on a share and share basis, and thus live a life of ease and comfort—comparatively.

So Quoipa-Moiru curbed his misgivings about the things that were *huaca* and took the spade that was shoved at him and dug with a will. The two almost-white scientists who were too proud to dig crouched again on their perches and watched his every move with jealous eyes.

From the red-white scientist's side came oaths and angry complaint.

"*Por Dios*, Sanchez. Have we measured aright, think you? I find nothing but mud and little stones like arrows and worthless pots."

Mere foolish relics of a vanished race which a collector would have bartered his soul for. But the red-white scientist just shoveled them aside and swore.

"*Carramba*," snarled Sanchez, muffled behind his cloak. "Was it not yourself who measured? As for the map, the old fool swore even as he died that it was correct, and the little figure that he showed was gold of the purest."

The big red-beard dug in vicious silence for another hour. Then he straightened his back and cursed some more. An idea came to him. His head swung bearishly low over his shoulder and his pale blue eyes frowned through a mat of ruddy brow at the rival excavation. He stepped out of his shallow hole and strode over to look into the digging of his partners in scientific endeavor. There was a burning suspicion in his inspection. The muffled birds of prey laughed in sour harmony.

"Well, what d'you think we're finding? Ingots?"

Since they had been suspecting the very same thing against him they knew exactly what was in his mind. They had already suggested covertly to one another that it would be just as well to keep an eye on the gringo's work, but they disliked the thought of intruding on his savage temper just then, and in any case all his movements were so profanely open that there was no real cause for anxiety that he was hiding out anything on them.

He returned sulkily to his own digging and resumed work. Progress was slow. The floor of the court in which they dug had been hard-trodden by many thousands of feet pressing upon it over a period of nobody knows how many hundreds of years. What packed crowds had surged and stamped through those massive quadrangles in prayer or dance or frenzy of sacrifice was only a matter for conjecture to students. That the Sanctuary-of-the-Labyrinth was especially holy to the Incas when the awful blight of Pizarro fell upon them is known. Evidence which might lead to the piecing together of the story remains to be unearthed by students of Inca history—as these "students" were assiduously unearthing just now.

The red one dug with a vigor worthy of such high scientific endeavour, and cursed the arrow heads and painted pots which impeded his progress. It was late when his spade struck something hard. At his exclamation the two hopped off their perch and hurried over to the hole like vultures to a corpse.

"What is? What have you found? *Car-ramba*, that one is permitted to see!"

They crowded in on him, eagerly rapacious. He threw them off with savage irritation.

"Sacred body and blood! Get off o' me!

How can I dig with you two hanging on my elbows? Give room."

They gave perhaps six inches, muttering that they had a right to see what he found. He growled something inarticulate and drove his spade into the hard earth in a frenzy. Again came a metallic clink. The red one dropped on his knees and scrabbled with his hands in the dirt. A thick finger caught under the edge of something. A rapid fire of high-pitched oaths came from him as he strained at it, for all the world like the whine of a terrier at a rat-hole. The others crowded in on his elbows again. Suddenly he snatched his hand away and cursed in plain English as blood from a deep gash in the ball of his thumb dripped into his digging.

The eyes of Quoipa-Moiru, staring with dull disinterest into his own pit thirty feet away, continued so to stare without a flicker. He might have been a statue of one of Millais' toil-crushed peasants. Yet he muttered to himself just one word—

"*Huaca*"

The red-headed man's rage turned against the two who hampered him, and they shrank from the fury in his face. Then at length intelligence asserted itself sufficiently to snatch the discarded spade and attack the obstinate thing again. A few strokes loosened it. He thrust his hand into the débris once more and with a final grunt jerked forth to the light a broad, flat blade of a dark glassy material.

That was all.

It was an obsidian sacrificial knife such as the high priests of the sun had used to cut the hearts out of their living human sacrifices. A priceless museum specimen. Only one other authentic example was known to exist.

The red-headed scientist held it in his hands and stared at it in silence for a long half-minute. Then with a hoarse scream of rage he swung his great arm and hurled the thing from him far out over the stone ramparts. In the ensuing silence the faint splash of it in the lake came back to them like a derisive silvery laugh.

At the same moment the sun, which had been peering over the edge of the Cordillera to see the last of the fiasco, dropped silently behind. And immediately with the shadow came the accentuated chill of the evening; and the towering, jagged snow caps, thrown into clear blue silhouette, seemed to advance

with a single stride and hang impending over the very edge of the lake.

Still nobody spoke. Till Sanchez shivered, and wrapped his cloak more closely round him.

"*Que carramba,*" he muttered brokenly. "Yet the old fool had proof that not all the gold was thrown into the lake. *Valgame Dios.*"

And, so muttering, he walked slowly to the tent.

His compatriot followed him; and after an interval of hesitation the white man decided to call it a day and went too, pausing to kick with a recurrence of moody suspicion at the other digging. They all stood around doing nothing. The reaction of disappointment was too keen to permit them even to quarrel. Quoipa-Moiru stood in the background, impassive and bovine as ever. Sanchez noticed him at last. He was too dispirited to vent his spleen on him personally; but he called to his compatriot who stood nearer to kick the dog in the stomach and chase him off. Then he countermanded with quick forethought.

"Hold," he said. "Better pay him something, I suppose; or tomorrow, perhaps, we have no laborer."

So Quoipa-Moiru possessed money for the first time in his life. Two silver pieces. About half a dollar. It was munificent, princely. Another lucrative day like that, and he would be able to realise some of his dreams. Nets would be his for the ordering. Leisure and emancipation from the continual wet.

Yet there stirred somewhere deep within his impassive exterior some vague impulse from the dim superstitions of his fathers. He understood nothing at all about it, and he knew but the faintest rumors more than nothing. It was a hereditary instinct of secrecy rather than a conscious reason. There were certain things *huaca*. That much was sure. And there had been the omen of the bleeding hand.

So Quoipa Moiru went that same night to the hut of Mamu the soothsayer and told him all that he had done.

 MAMU was as inscrutably wise as he was unbelievably old. Nobody knew just how wise or how old. He was the hereditary seer of the Sacred Rock. That was as much as even the Indians knew. His father had been a seer before him, and

his grandfather before that; and they must surely have been terribly old in their day. More than one learned *padre* with a genuine thirst for ethnological research had tried to get into communication with the old wizard, one of the few remaining who could lift a little corner of the veil.

But Mamu would have none of the *padres*. Particularly was knowledge to be hidden from the white men, he maintained. This was *his* hereditary instinct. So no white man had ever seen the face of Mamu the Soothsayer. He was a rumor; a legend as fugitive as the legends of the lost race from which he was descended.

Mamu crouched, a blanket-swathed bundle, in the dimness of his little mud hut. Since he was very old and the life pulsed slowly through his shrunken frame, a tiny flame of smoldering *takia* raised the inside temperature perhaps five degrees above the normal night. It was sufficient to throw faint high-lights on a shrewd old face of a thousand furrows with an extraordinarily high and narrow bald-forehead and beady little black eyes as alert and cunning as a raven's.

Quoipa, squatting on the other side of the tiny fire before him, telling the tale, saw presently nothing but the eyes glowing out of a vast darkness, and he settled down from his squirmings and fidgetings before the wizard and told all the truth, even to the matter of the two silver pieces. By the time he had come to the end of his tale he sat as motionless as the seer himself and only his lips moved.

Mamu heard him to the end and waited for more, the eyes compelling the last shred of detail of what this one had said and that one had done. Then the eyes closed and, as if a lamp had gone out, it seemed to Quoipa that only a vast blackness remained. Slowly the glow of the fire reasserted itself in his vision, and Mamu spoke out of his ancient wisdom.

"Great grandson of my friend," he said, and it was an order, "thus shall it be done. There are things *huaca* which must never come to light. Listen to the wisdom of our fathers. In the old days was darkness over all the earth and much misery. Till the Lord Sun listened to the prayers of Manco Capac his priest and took pity upon the people and burst from the cleft in the Sacred Rock to take up his abode in the sky. Thus became Manco Capac the first of the Incas

and established the *huaca* which has been since that day.

"Always have the spirits of the *huaca* protected their own. Always will they protect. The omen of the bleeding hand was a true sign. As the spirits took back to themselves the sacred knife from that white man, so will they keep the other greater things that the white men seek. Always from the seekings of these white men has evil come upon our people. Therefore, great grandson of my friend who was, since I am old and the night is chill, I give into your hands a charm, *huaca* of a hundred fold and very powerful. The sacred sign of the Inca, no less. This you will place this night upon the mold where you have dug. So shall it work its magic against these profane ones. To-morrow, when they have gone, you will bring it back to me and will forget what you have seen."

A shrewd old psychologist was this heir to the wisdom of the lost race. He crutched himself on his wasted arms to a corner of his hut, where he burrowed a moment in a pile of ancient rags, and then he hobbled back and handed the potent charm to Quoipa, who greatly feared to take it. Yet the compelling eyes were upon him, and he stretched his hand across the fire smoke.

"Look upon it that you may know it again," commanded the voice behind the eyes.

Quoipa's eyes were able to drop reverently upon the sacred thing which just filled his palm. It was a disk of metal, yellow and heavy, and in the dim glow he could discern the sign chiselled deep into the dull surface. A burnished circle with rays projecting from it; within it, a cube. Suddenly he prostrated himself before the thing and hid his face in the dust of the floor.

"Go, servant of the *huaca*," said the voice above him, "and do its bidding with speed."

Quoipa crept from the hut very much afraid and sweated in the cold night air.

 THE next morning, before dawn, he was ensconced in a cranny between two great blocks of squared stone to watch the sacred thing that was in his care, wondering darkly how he was to get it back to the wizard and how the spirits would set about protecting their own. The thin glow that began to outline the distant peaks of the Eastern Cordillera had hardly established itself before the sun leapt from a

mountain-top with the same suddenness that it sprang from the Sacred Rock in the days of Manco Capac.

Instantly its emblem, lying on the little heap of yesterday's digging, heliographed back a golden greeting. Quoipa-Moiru shaded his eyes and took a vast comfort from the omen. He wrapped his poncho about him and crouched motionless in the morning chill to wait and watch.

Three shivery hours passed before the white men crawled out of their tent, yawning and disgruntled. They stood about aimlessly and shivered. It was too cold to wash, and they were too dispirited to think so immediately about breakfast. These were not the kind of scientists who could labor tirelessly for weeks on the meager return which Science so often vouchsafes to her devotees. Yesterday's disappointment on top of their high hopes had sapped their ambition and left them ill-tempered and peevish.

The red-white man thought with disgust about food and strolled listlessly over to the scene of yesterday's labor to speculate on the chances of trying others of the staked-out spots. The emblem of the sun winked malignantly at him.

And then it was given to Quoipa, the watcher, to see how shrewdly the old wizard had reasoned. Only to him the swift dénouement of the story was but the manifestation of the spirits of the *huaca* protecting their own.

The white man stopped as if shot, and instant suspicion blazed into his already ill-tempered face. He snatched the thing up and turned it over in his palm.

"Gold, by —!" he snarled. And the next immediate thought: "Lousy crooks of spiggoties. Holdin' out on me, yeah."

The rage gleamed the whiter on his face for the ruddy background. He swung up his head in that curious bearish action of his and bellowed as he would to peons—

"Veng' aqui, you crooked lice!"

Both men looked up, startled at his tone, indignant and stung out of their apathy to vindictive energy by the insulting name. They came over together, muttering sideways counsel to one another as they came. The big white man's fury had reached that point just this side of explosion at which his face was dead white and his voice almost calm, though with a hysterical tremble in it. He held out the disk in his palm.

"I've made a lucky find," he said with devilish sarcasm. "Lucky for me, that is."

The two gaped at the thing with boggling eyes, and their suspicion in turn was immediate and unanimous. What was he doing poking about their digging? Why was he pretending to find this thing there? How much more was planted away somewhere? His was the place where all the arrow-heads and pots and the knife had been. Surely gold also.

All these things passed between the two with perfect understanding in the first swift glance. They found expression in the double query—

"Is that all?"

Then the red-white man's rage exploded. And thereafter the spirits of the sacred *huaca* thing wrought their magic with appalling speed. Suddenly the big hairy hands dropped the disk and shot out to grip a yellow throat in each. The thick fingers almost encircled the lean necks. There was no wriggling out of that grip. The fierce gust of his fury shook them as a hurricane shakes frail saplings. His breath frothed between his clenched teeth as he gritted:

"Hold out on me, ye yellow-bellied mestizos, would ye? Hide up the stuff, ha? Where's the rest of it? Where'd you plant it, ye crooks? 'Fess up before I rip the gullets out o' you."

With head rocking like a ball on a limp string and teeth clicking together, Sanchez managed to gasp:

"You. You yourself—f-fi—found—*ca-carra*—"

"I?— You lying dago! Curse you for— By —, I'll get some truth out o' you."

Crazed by his own violence, the red maniac backed them both against the wall, clawing at his face with futile hands, and fell to banging their heads against the stone, which reddened with each furious smash.

The wicked yellow glare in the eyes of Sanchez gave place to choking, starting terror. The other lolled limp. Slowly, with many slips as his tottering balance failed, the right foot of Sanchez lifted, steadying itself against the wall behind him. His right hand went down to meet it while his left clawed at the strangling grip.

More than once the hand nearly reached; and then the foot was stamped down again in the desperate need to keep upright.

Once down, he could see death at the

hands of that maniac. At last groping hand and unstable boot connected. His desperate grip fastened on the thin handle of the mestizo knife in his boot sheath. For just a flash the terror in the staring eyes gave place to snarling hate; and then Sanchez braced himself against the wall with the last of his strength and heaved desperately forward. The sun flashed thinly on a swift upward arc, and blood spurted from both strangling forearms together.

With a hoarse shriek the big man let go, and stood staring for a moment in incomprehending wonder at the spurting blood. Sanchez fell back against the wall, gasping and nursing his throat. The other slumped to the ground and rolled over to his hands and knees, coughing.

Only a moment. Then the big man's voice broke again in a scream such as a dumb man might give in agony, and the madness took him. With the sudden clumsy speed of the bear and with the same demoniac red glitter in his eyes, he snatched the spade from the mound of earth at his heels and in the same motion drove it in a fierce upward thrust at the spent figure plastered against the wall.

The broad blade, like an old time halberd, struck low on the sagging chin and crashed through jaw and throat beyond. Sanchez subsided slowly, sitting on nothing against the wall, clawing with nerveless hands spread-eagled against the stone, and rolled over, gurgling horribly. The murderer grinned maniac satisfaction and stood panting inarticulate things.

"That'll teach ye! Yellow—— Double-cross me, yeah? Lousy half-breed——"

The insane tendency was to go on indefinitely; but his attention was distracted by a moaning cry of awful fear. The other man was staggering to his feet and running drunkenly across the court toward the exit least littered with fallen stone. The cry was his undoing. The lust was upon the killer. He shouted what might have been some atavistic battle-cry of his long ago forefather who lived in a cave and rushed after the wretched runner, brandishing his weapon in the air. He caught up with him just as he reached the low pile of debris at the far doorway and aimed a frightful blind swipe with the spade.

It was no club such as his forefather used when the red rage possessed him; but it was heavy enough to beat the exhausted man to

the ground. The maniac shouted his battle-cry again and turned the edge and hacked at the prone figure till it squirmed no more. Then he grinned his primordial triumph over it and frothed foul epithets upon its treachery.

A great aeroplane shadow sailed over his head, banked steeply and circled over again. It perked a red-wattled bald head over to one side and croaked sepulchrally.

Another, and another. So low that the rustle of their pinions in the wind was an audible *pr-rr-rr* of dry sound.

The maniac's head flung back and the pale eyes glowered at them from under the overhanging fringe of brow like an animal glaring from a cave. His laboring breath came from between his set teeth in a spluttery hiss, and he shivered with some far-off recollection of something that began to impinge upon his brain.

Reason began to reassert itself. And with reason, fear. With an abrupt start he dropped the instrument of death upon which he supported his red hands and swung his head in that animal gesture to look over his shoulder at that other gory heap.

"Jeez!" he muttered. "Jeez!" And mumbled, his fingers at his lips.

Terror swooped down on him like the black shadow of one of the funereal birds. Suddenly he began to run. Blindly, lumberingly, stumbling over fallen blocks and piles of débris. Out and away from that haunted place of sacrifices. Down to the lake's edge.

Long logy *tortora* bundle-boats of the fisherfolk lay there. Not hauled ashore like white men's boats, for they were too heavy. They floated some thirty feet out in the shallows at their stone anchors. Never stopping, the white man splashed out to the nearest. Climbed in, snatching his legs up as if some primæval water monster were after him. Poled out with great lunging thrusts of the long paddle against the reedy bottom. Then plowed up the water with vast clumsy erratic strokes, heading for the pale purple shore of the mainland. Away from that terrible island of evil spirits. Looking back over his shoulder, he saw a great carrion bird, black against the morning sun, dip and swoop behind the gruesome rampart. Another and another. The beating of giant wings, and the hiss and scream of them as they fought, pursued him over the water.

"Jeez!" he muttered again. "Jeez!"

And he bent over and strained his great shoulder muscles against the long paddle.



QUOIPA-MOIRU came softly from his hiding-place. On his face was visible expression at last. Not horror; not shrinking; not disgust. Only awe for the potent fetish which he was compelled to approach; to touch; to carry back to the old wizard who was so wise.

Mamu the Soothsayer squatted in his doorway wrapped to the eyes in a flaming crimson and green poncho, letting the sun soak into his old bones. Quoipa placed the ancient relic of the Inca at his feet with a vast relief and pressed his head to the ground.

"*Yatina k' chekka*. Holder of all knowledge," he mumbled. "All the omens were true." And he recounted with passionless detail all the things that had happened.

The seer stretched a withered hand from under his poncho and took in the sacred fetish thing.

"All the omens are true, great-grandson of my friend," he nodded. "The things that are *huaca* will never come to light. Go, and forget what you have seen. For the spirits of the *huaca* will surely take to themselves those who have knowledge which must be secret. As they will surely take that white man when he comes again—for surely he will come, drawn by the power of the sacred sign. When that day comes, bring me word again. Go and be silent."

Quoipa-Moiru went. And it is probable that he did forget; so impressed was he by the magic of the aged soothsayer.

Shrewd old wizard.

So Quoipa returned to his fish nets; and his luck—surely on account of his virtue in the matter of the silver pieces—was phenomenal. His nets, when those of his fellows were tearing all about him, remained miraculously immune. Bad bottom in the shallows just melted away when his gear fouled. The little *boga* fish swam close to the surface and showed themselves—which surely was a mark of the especial favour of the spirits.

For Quoipa's method of fishing was the most primitive in the world. He would go out in the cold gray morning with his fellows in whatsoever direction the wind happened to be blowing. Gradually diverging, they would cruise the lake, peering into the pale blue chilly depths, looking for fish.

When the wind ripples were too fast; or when the water was misty—as it was whenever the spirits of the lake need an offering—they could see nothing. Sometimes the water would remain misty for days at a time, and the spirits would not be satisfied with offerings of colored wools and corn and frozen potatoes.

In the old days when this happened there would be a great ceremony at the Sacred Rock, and a high priest, all loaded down with gold and feather work, would sacrifice a maiden upon the great slab of diorite with the blood channels carved in it. But nowadays Quoipa and his fellows were a peaceful folk. All they did was to give more potatoes; and in extreme cases they would make a night foray and steal a young llama from the land Indians to offer to the spirits and would hope earnestly that one of the land Indians might inadvertently get drowned in the lake.

However, in these lucky days there was no occasion to steal young llamas by the dark of the moon. The favor of the water spirits was with Quoipa the virtuous. The lake remained cold and clear. Its characteristic pale blue was paler than had been known in a generation. The winds blew to greet the sun in the morning and to make gentle obeisance in the evening; which meant that there were no long, back-breaking paddle-races home. Cats' paws, where Quoipa searched, melted away and left an unruffled glass surface through which he could discern the schools of *boga* at phenomenal depths.

Then Quoipa would whistle shrilly like the little barred hawks that hunted so assiduously for lizards over the bare rocks of his home; and all the *tortora* boats with their window-blind sails would converge upon him with answering whistles—so that the spirits of the water would think that the spirits of the air were calling upon them for food for their birds. And they would ring the foolish *boga* round with their nets; silly fish, who didn't know enough to disperse and break away, but huddled together in a terrified bunch till most of them were taken.

Quoipa and his people were becoming unprecedently rich in goods and gear gained in trade for their produce.

And then, into his prosperous era of peace, came once again white men.

They arrived as had the others, by the wheezy old steam-boat that ran—every now and then—from the La Paz railway

terminal at Quaqui to the Peruvian Port of Puno. As had those others, they brought a tent and cooking-pots—not quite so meagre as the last—and a long heavy box.

One of them was a dry, withered, little old man, scant of straggly gray beard and hair, sharp of feature and of tongue, with a pair of the brightest, most inquisitively bird-like eyes magnified to startling proportions by heavy tortoise-shell-rimmed toric lenses.

The other was in direct antithesis, a large, beefy, much younger man, with a clean-shaven, full-blooded face and a mop of black hair and heavy brows; an uncouth creature in comparison with his alert elder.

The fisherfolk had learnt to regard white men and long heavy packages with suspicion. But the younger man spoke to them sharply. Quoipa was thrust forward as having had experience with the ways of the white lords. There was no retreat. So with sullen indifference he helped them to establish themselves under the growling direction of the young one, who seemed to be some sort of servant and interpreter to the elder, who spoke no Spanish, but fussed around giving endless directions as to the exact disposition of their gear to the younger, who translated some of the instructions with a sulky air of rebellion.

When it was all over at last, and every littlest item had been carefully checked over by the fussy "Water Hen," as the Indians immediately dubbed him; when Quoipa was getting ready to receive his kick and dismissal, a miracle happened.

The Water Hen's worried expression gave place suddenly to the kindest smile in the world, and he fished from a mess of booklets and papers and pencils in his bulging pocket a piece of real money and handed it to Quoipa.

Quoipa was as properly thunderstruck as he had a good right to be. What manner of white men were these? Or rather, this one? For there remained a vague suspicion against the younger.

The latter was speaking again at the direction of the elder, who hopped nervously about trying to understand what was said and nodded eager confirmation when he thought he had caught a word or two. Quoipa clutched the precious money in his hand and struggled with the evil spirit of avarice. Money in his hand again! Gods of his fathers! What lifelong comfort might

not be attained with just a little money!

Yet the instincts of his fathers stirred in the back of his consciousness. There were certain things *huaca*, guarded by powerful spirits who could awfully demonstrate their displeasure. And the tale that these men brought was even more preposterous than that of the three *científicos*. These simple ones said that they wanted to catch fish. Nothing less—and no more. Just fish out of the lake. All the kinds there were. Was ever such foolishness heard before? When only the *boga* were fit to eat.

"Good," said Quoipa. He would sell them all the fish they needed, and very cheaply.

"No," the young man insisted with irritation. They didn't want to buy fish. They wanted to catch them themselves; and they needed the services of a man with a boat.

"How mysterious," said Quoipa. "Were they, then, also *científicos*?"

"Yes," said the young man. And then, no, he was just the old man's helper and interpreter; and the old man was entirely mad; and what the — business was it of the Indian dog's anyhow.

Here the old man smiled again and nodded violently and performed another miracle.

"Jalla," he said. "*Challhua munti. Ma-real churramma.*"

Which was fairly understandable Aymará for, "That's right. I want fish. I'll pay you one real a day."

For the second time in his life the stone idol which was Quoipa's face registered an emotion. A keen physiognomist would have detected a distinct trace of surprise. He stepped back out of the range of black magic and muttered:

"Awai! My father has the tongue?"

The old man nodded again with the delight of a child.

"Little, little," he said. "Good *padre*, La Paz. Teach. You work. I pay."

And he held up a silver real and moved his hand in an arc across the sky from East to West.

Quoipa wondered what the mysterious signs were for. Magic, probably, he thought. But he understood, "*Ma-real churramma*," very well. So he hired himself out as a boatman for more money than he quite believed existed. And then went straightway to tell these things to Mamu the Soothsayer.



OLD Mamu squatted poncho-wrapped before his hut just as though he had never moved a limb since the last time. He listened with narrow-eyed attention to the telling, prompting Quoipa from time to time with a keen question to elicit fuller details of the manner and speech of each of the men. Then he fetched his medicine-bag embroidered with figures of llamas and bulls and cast the coca leaves to divine the omens, stirring them with a skinny forefinger to let the wind tumble the leaves, and recasting. Long he pored over them. Then he delivered his verdict.

"Thus shall it be done, Quoipa, great grandson of Quoipa my friend. The old one is without guile. Do all that he says and take the money he gives. Thus also is virtue rewarded. The young one is evil. His desire is only for things *huaca* that must never come to light. Therefore everything that he desires is *huaca*. But he is not to be feared. The spirits will take to themselves their own and will take also very shortly that white man. Go then; and what is done by day, come and report each night."

Rather cryptic, as is the way with oracles. Quoipa's intelligence was not very great. He gathered from it all only a reiteration of the inviolability of the things that were tabu; and he went away full of wonder for the wisdom of old Mamu who could divine so many things about strangers from a far country.

How was he to know that the ancient keeper of the mysteries had watched their arrival with the same jealous suspicion as he had watched the arrival of all strangers for heaven knows how many decades? And even had he known, why should he question the wisdom of a wizard who gave him leave to accept a princely salary from a foolish employer?

In three days he would have three reales, a dollar. In six days he would be wealthier than any man on the island. Quoipa knew nothing about praying; but he hoped very earnestly that the spirits would not be too hasty about taking their promised toll; and to add power to his wish he tied many fathoms of brightly dyed woolen yarns—enough to make a very fancy net—into odd lengths and queer knots, as his father had done before him without knowing anything about the meaning of it all, and floated the

tangle away on the lake below the Sacred Rock.

Yet the spirits worked with appalling swiftness. Quoipa took his employers out in—or rather on—his boat; for there is no inside space to two bundles of *tortora* reeds—and caught *boga* fish for them in miraculous draughts. Each time the old man sorted the catch eagerly over and selected but a few; and each time he demanded, "*niaraqua*," other kind.

Truly was the old man quite mad, thought Quoipa; when everybody knew that there were but eight kinds in all the lake, and that of these the *mocomacu* and the *luaru*, so far from being not good to eat, were actively poisonous. Still, what business was it of his, since old Mamu had told him to do all that the old one ordered?

All day they ranged the lake looking for *niaraqua*; and at night the foolish old man opened up the suspicious chest and took from it a queer little shiny squirt with a long sharp nozzle and filled up his assorted catch with an acrid smelling liquid which brought tears to his eyes and which he called *formalina*; and then he wrapped them lovingly in soft cloths and put them bodily into a big bottle containing another mysterious liquid which smelled most familiarly like the cane alcohol which the fisherfolk smuggled over from the Peruvian side for the land Indians when they made *fiesta*.

A weird rite, this. Quoipa made up his mind that the old man was a magician and reported the same to Mamu. But the seer was in no way indignant about a rival in his field. All he questioned about was the young man. What did he do? How did he act. What was his speech?

He acted sulkily, said Quoipa. He sat at the other end of the boat from the old one, taking no interest at all in his quest for *niaraqua*; and he answered him roughly when called upon to help with the nets; not at all with the respect that a servant should show.

"Hm," muttered Mamu. "Watch him carefully, and tell me all that he does."

So for four days more they cruised the lake looking for profitless fish that nobody could eat; and the evil young man's temper soured with each hour. He growled fiercely at the old man, who shrank from his anger. What he was saying was:

"Why the — don't you tell him to fish

the deep water under the big rock? That's where you'll get your blasted specimens. I'm telling you what I know, mister. He don't listen to me, curse him; or I'd make him take us over myself."

The meek old gentleman apparently took umbrage at last. He adjusted his spectacles with a thin-veined nervous hand and made his feeble play to put his assistant in his place.

"Mr. Hogan," he said with acid formality, "I hired you in Mollendo on your reputed knowledge of these parts, and on your own professed anxiety to come as my assistant in my work. I am sorry to say you only obstruct. It is my desire to study the shallow water varieties, of which only three are known, before I take up the larger matter of the deep-water fishes. In my own good time I shall——"

"Aa-rrgh! To — with your desires!"

The young man's voice broke as he screamed his rebellion and his incongruously pale eyes glared sudden rage as he made a motion as if to scramble over and strike his employer. But he was still capable of common sense. With many swallowings and clenchings of convulsive fists he restrained his temper and contented himself with snarling:

"Well, if you won't tell him I'll — well make him go over anyhow."

He turned to Quoipa and ordered him in Spanish:

"To the big rock. We fish the deep water below."

Quoipa remained standing inert, sullenly incomprehending. The big man scrambled savagely to his feet and pushed roughly at his shoulder to face him round in the required direction. But Quoipa was astonishingly muscular, and his bare feet had known *tortora* floats for full twenty years. He braced his body against the thrust; and the beefy white man's only success was nearly to push himself off his balance. The boat careened over; at which the old man uttered a startled cry and assented with nervous acquiescence.

"Yes, yes. To the big rock. Go."

So Quoipa headed impassively for the sacred rock. But he managed his Japanese slat-sail very craftily. The deep water below the rock was *huaca*, the abode of those spirits who had torn the nets of his father. Here was distinctly a case for the wisdom for Mamu to pass judgment upon. It was sunset when they arrived.

 OLD Mamu had been watching the boat for half the day from the top of the rock, which was *huaca* to all but himself. But Quoipa found him in his hut crouched over his tiny dried-dung fire, too feeble to brave the cold air.

What does the young one say? What does he do? Was all the wizard's interest.

So Quoipa, under the spell of the glowing eyes, disclosed every last detail of all the little things that had lost themselves in his subconscious.

"And his manner is exactly as the manner of that other great red one who fled," Quoipa enlarged. "Also his rage is as terrible. Further, he performs every night a ceremony, anointing his head with a water which he guards most carefully. A magic, without doubt, to give him strength. His voice, moreover, is——"

Old Mamu grunted in a most unmagician-like manner.

"Quoipa-Moiru," he said. "You are a fool. Four days have you been in the presence of this evil man, and know nothing. What color, tell me, is the hair on his arms?"

Quoipa had to visualize the man for himself.

"The color," he recalled with pained reflection, "is the color of a red llama, though not so red as a poncho."

"Good. And the color of the eyes?"

"The color of the eyes is the color of the lake where it is not too deep."

The magician's grunt was a snort of scorn.

"Doubly are you a fool, Quoipa-Moiru," he told him. "Yet even a fool who catches fish may know that the color of any llama may be dyed any other color, even black; and that a beard may be——"

Quoipa Moiru sat upright on his heels and clapped his hand over his open mouth and so remained, dumfounded at the wisdom of this seer who saw all things. The glowing eyes took hold of him, and all the rest merged into a haze, and the haze into a vast blackness, and out of the blackness came the voice, authoritative, compelling.

"Thus shall it be done, Quoipa, great grandson of Quoipa my friend. Tomorrow the young one will give order that the fishing be in the deep water below the rock, which is *huaca*; for evil spirits have given him a knowledge which must be kept hidden. It may be that the spirits of the *huaca* will keep hidden what is theirs, as they hid it

from him before, and as they kept it hidden from the nets of your father. It may be that the evil spirits whom the white man serves will prevail. In which case"—the voice became thunderous in its commanding force—"you, Quoipa Moiru, are the servant of the *huaca* in my place, who am old; old and feeble"—the voice began to dwindle away to a faint point in the darkness—"feeble and very old; having no strength but the strength of the knowledge of our fathers. Alas, very feeble and very old."

Quoipa Moiru remained rigid, sweating in the cold dark, his eyes held fixed by an immeasurably distant point of light from which the voice came. The light glowed and twinkled like a faint star and began to come nearer and to expand as it came. Nearer and faster, till it rushed at him with the speed of a comet. Dully his mind urged him to flee; but his limbs remained frozen. With a final swoop the hurtling thing brought up with an abruptness which was a shock in front of his face and remained there, glowing as if red-hot from its frightful speed. It became borne in upon him that he had seen it before. A disk with a burnished sun and a cube in its center. Suddenly the voice boomed out close to his side.

"Look once upon the sacred sign on the Inca, Quoipa-Moiru, protector of the *huaca*. Look and be strong."

The glow sank slowly lower, and dwindled, and grew dull, and then enlarged again till it became apparent to Quoipa that it was only the glow of the dung fire after all. The voice of old Mamu was droning as it had droned for the last four days:—

"Go, Quoipa Moiru, great grandson of my friend, and bring me word of all that happens."

He went, greatly fearing, and understanding nothing at all. Only one matter was rooted in his mind.

"Things *huaca* which must never come to light."

 THE morrow's dawn brought swift verification of all the wizard's prophecies. The young man, exactly as had been foretold, was for the first time eager to get to work. He took truculent charge of affairs and gruffly ordered that fishing was to be in the deeps along the cliff under the Sacred Rock. The old man weakly acquiesced rather than brave his violent temper.

Quoipa-Moiru, in his not very astute mind, marveled at the wonderful pre-vision of the wizard, and with immobile stolidity paddled round the little promontory and cast his nets as directed.

Almost immediately there was luck. The lines tautened as the nets dragged against resistance. For the first time since the beginning of the work the big young man was eager to help with the hauling in. Slowly the weight came up. The young man began to become as excited as Quoipa was stolid. The catch began to shimmer up through the pale blue depths. Quoipa's hardened muscle heaved as stoutly as did the bull strength of the beefy young man. His excitement—with his certitude of battle between guardian spirits of the *huaca* and evil spirits of the white man—was tenfold as frightful as the other's. But all the reaction he showed was to grunt and heave like a small derrick.

Another moment, and the excitement of both of them collapsed like overstrained balloons and transferred itself in all its joint power to the old man. The young man cursed his God. Quoipa Moiru grunted. The old man squealed.

The weight was a miraculous draught of fishes.

The gods of sacred science gave him of the strength which the young man ceased to employ. Up came the net; and the old man, with the avid cries of a raptorial bird, flung himself upon it. Into it, rather, he dived, and embraced the whole slithery mess.

They were *boga* mostly; but a continuous croon of happiness announced every now and then a deep water *mocomacu* or a *luira*. And then a scream of joy heralded a new species. The old man scrambled out of the slimy shambles and loved the wriggling thing, calling it pet names in Latin with his own appended thereto.

"Quite and unfeignedly mad," said Quoipa Moiru. "And therefore," as that infallible old seer had already told him, "without guile, harmless. But that other. The evil one?"

That one glowered sulky disappointment. As he had once before demonstrated, he was not of the kind that could labor long without reward. It was the old man who directed further operations with enthusiasm. For that one specimen he was disposed to forgive and forget all past unpleasantnesses.

So Quoipa cast again and caught fish with varying success.

"Closer in to the rock,—," growled the young man.

Quoipa looked to the old one for confirmation. That one was crooning over his dead fish and was inclined to be agreeable to anything. So Quoipa paddled in right under the brow of the Sacred Rock and knotted in an extra length of line and cast.

The net dragged stickily over the unseen depths and came up, not exactly heavily, yet with a certain reluctance. The pale water muddied as it rose. Black ooze and clots and gummy clods bulged from the net. Quoipa hoisted the whole load on board to wash out the mess. One of the sticky clods was more uniform in shape than the rest. The young man's pale eyes lit with sudden interest as he reached out a hairy paw for it. He sluiced some of the black muck from it, and the cleaned surface showed black again. But the spirit of excitement leapt like a live thing with a volition of its own from age back to youth once more.

"A curiously shaped cooking-pot of some sort," said the old man with mild interest. "I suppose some Indian has dropped it over the cliff." And he told Quoipa Moiru, "The fish seem to be further out. Back off a bit."

But, "Cast again right there, you black swine," snarled the young man with a sudden access of ferocity. "At once, or I'll— Cast in, — you!"

The old man quailed before the savagery in the young man's eyes and for the sake of peace gave in. Quoipa cast with a wooden face and averted head and watched the young man apparently through the back of it. The latter crouched over the pot with lips bared in a greedy snarl, like a wild beast over its kill; impatient to feast and ready to defend. With a clasp-knife he scraped at the blackened surface; and suddenly his breath escaped from between his teeth with a sharp—

"Aa-ah."

The old man was half-heartedly helping Quoipa to haul in the net; so he did not see the yellow glint under the blade. Quoipa was manfully hauling at his line with his back to the stern of the boat where the young man crouched, so he surely could not have seen. The young man wedged the "curiously shaped cooking-pot" between the twin cigars of *tortora* reed and

came to add his more than willing strength to the labor.

Another load of black, evil-smelling mud came up. No need for Quoipa to wash the stuff out. The young man growled as he dropped on his knees over it and set to squeezing the foul paste through his fingers. Every last morsel of it. His mutterings were the noises of an angry bear rooting for grubs which it did not find. With a final curse he flung the net over once more and growled—

"Let 'er go."

The old man sat meekly acquiescent. Another heavy sticky haul. The young man doing most of the eager work this time. Somehow, in the struggle with the line, Quoipa changed places with him. And somehow, inadvertently, as they strained together, his foot slipped, tripped over the cooking-pot, and it swept into the lake. Nobody heard the little plop of its sinking and nobody saw the little stream of bubbles that it left.

Up came the evil load of black stuff. Once more the young man cast himself upon it and growled ferocious warning. Growled louder as he scrambled in the muck. Nothing again,— Yes, something. Long and hard. He sluiced it hungrily.

"Blood of God, and curses upon the sacred shoes!" Only a bone. The savage disappointment turned upon the boatman. "I'm a — if I don't think you're soldiering on me. You've drifted out, ye sulky dog. Get in closer, where we got that pot, or——"

And then he noticed that the pot was gone.

For a split second his glare was pure wild beast. And in that second it took in every cranny of the boat and every bulge in its occupants' clothing. In a *tortora* reed raft nothing of that size could be hidden. With that realization his bull voice broke to its characteristic false pitch, and he screamed blasphemies upon his God in English and in Spanish and stamped his feet in the boat and shook his great fists in the air in the savage impotence of his rage.

When the lurid stream began to bubble thickly for sheer lack of force behind it the old man attempted a feeble pacification.

"My dear Mr. Hogan, you really must calm yourself. The thing must have gone overboard, of course. Doubtless someday you may find another. In the meanwhile it is quite evident that the fish prefer to run a bit farther off shore. So——"

The torrent of the other's wrath, all the stronger for its temporary stay, surged up against the interference. With face twitching and heavy brows jerking up and down like a gorilla's, the man screamed his uncontrollable rage again.

"Blast your hide, ye silly old —. D'ye think I hooked up with you and came up here to give a hoot about your stinking fish? Do I look that big a fool? I'm here to— I— Ye poor goat, if you interfere with me, I'll— Curse you, shut yer head and get outa here! Get off o' this boat! That's what! Hanged if I won't put you ashore! That's what I'll do! Come buttin' in on me all the time! Here——" to Quoipa—"paddle ashore an' heave this old fool out!"

And as Quoipa remained inert, he scrambled forward and beat him from his paddle with a rain of blows and drove the boat himself with savage strokes round the bend of the little promontory. On the beach beyond, he seized the old man by the arm, jerked him ashore with a brutal heave and threw his precious board of fish after him.

Quoipa Moiru stood, dully unpartizan, in the middle of his boat as he had always stood. The dominant white man stepped on board again and ordered:

"Go on, back to the same place! And we'll get something a damsite better than fish."

Still Quoipa-Moiru stood, immobile as a rock, and as rugged and sullenly unreceptive. The white man's teeth snapped in an animal snarl again as he gripped him by the arm and drew back a heavy fist to strike. Then a thought came.

"Fool!" he hissed at him. "I'll give you fifty reales. A hundred, if you'll see sense and do as I tell you."

Quoipa Moiru's face changed never a line. But he took up his paddle and drove the boat round the curve of the promontory.

 THE old man was left alone with his dead fish. He slumped down on the sand among them and felt very old and frail and alone. The sudden rebellion of his hired assistant was as disastrous as it was inexplicable. Alone in an inhospitable land. The old man sat with his poor old head in his thin, helpless hands and thought and puzzled and hoped that the other might return presently in a better frame of mind. He would overlook everything, he told himself. He would make

concessions. He would even let his work suffer, if thereby he might maintain a working standard of peace.

But the chill of sundown drove him to the shelter of his tent before the prodigal rebel returned. The night he spent was very miserable. His single thought was as to how he would be able to continue his work without the help of the assistant upon whom he had relied. If that good Indian lad, who seemed to understand so well, might be willing, perhaps—but the Indian was probably by this time cowed into submission by the brutal savagery of the big young man, even as he himself had been cowed.

A very miserable night indeed. Perhaps he slept. He did not know. In the morning he crept from the tent, a broken old man; prepared to give up and go away, perhaps to die.

And there, squatting in the sunshine, was the sort of kindly miracle that he himself, upon occasion, performed.

The good Indian lad. As stolid and as dull and as delightfully sullen as ever. The Indian rose with alacrity.

"My father is ready?" he asked. "Today the omens are good for fishing."

The old man looked at his miracle with scientific disbelief. Yet hope came and tugged at his heart. Much would he brave for the sacred cause of his work if the conditions might be at all possible. He struggled with his halting Aymará.

"I ready," he said with hesitation. "But—other white man? He angry? Beat."

Quoipa Moiru made a large motion with his hand, including vaguely all earth and water and air and shook his head.

"The young white man has gone away," he said noncommittally. "He will not come back today. The omens are good and the boat is ready."

The old man had formulated a vague theory of drunkenness which would account for the outburst of yesterday. The debauch would continue probably for a few days. Much priceless work might be accomplished without interference. He was grateful for the respite. And as he weighed the pros and cons of his theory, he found himself seated presently in the boat. A hope came to him. A thought that perhaps in yester-

day's first lucky place a kindly fate might let him catch another specimen of that unknown species so brutally spoilt by his drunken assistant. He made the suggestion to the good Indian lad; and Quoipa-Moiru with taciturn gravity paddled to the spot and made his cast.

Fate was apparently eager to manifest itself. The net dragged phenomenally heavy. In brotherly amity the frail old white man and the muscular young Indian lad heaved upon the line. Unwillingly the load came up, heavy and logy. Higher it rose, blurry under the brisk ripples of the morning breeze. There was black mud aplenty; clinging gummily; loath to let go; and something besides, queerly indistinct.

Some strange monster of the deeps perhaps, thought the old man. Anything weird or horrible might occur in this mysterious lake. Those ripples were so exasperatingly obscuring. He tugged with a will. The thing rose soggy and sloshed through the broken surface.

The old man let go his hold on the line with a choking gasp and fell back into the shallow concavity of the boat. The thing bobbed alongside and grinned its final hate, the face set in its last anthropoid twitch, the lips curled back in their last animal snarl. In the very center of the forehead, dead between the heavy black brows and the mat of hair, was a thin, crudely cut design. A circle with strokes radiating from it, and within it a more or less square.

"Gracious heavens! Good Lord, what a horror! God have mercy on his soul! How did it happen? How did he come to get drowned?"

The old man stammered his questions and shuddered away from the thing.

With a face of the ultimate impassivity Quoipa-Moiru drew a knife from among the reeds of his boat and cut the line free.

"There are things *huaca* which must never come to light," he muttered, almost as an incantation. "This is evil water, my father. I have other nets; and I know a place where the new fish of yesterday lives in plenty. And my father will pay me one real a day."

The old man meekly acquiesced in everything.

The CAMP-FIRE

A
MEETING-PLACE
for READERS,
WRITERS
and ADVENTURERS



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of heaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A LETTER from a Navy comrade concerning a Russian refugee:

U. S. S. *Edsall*,
Varna, Bulgaria.

Harold Lamb's write-up in "Camp-Fire" relative to the Cossack Siech was so interesting that I feel prompted to tell you about the Cossack that is now doing duty on the U. S. S. *Edsall*.

TEMIR BEY, Prince Murat, is the name by which he was known at the Czar's court—for he was Captain of His Imperial Majesty's own regiment.

Prince Murat was the general of all the Cossacks during the later part of the revolution against the Bolsheviks, and with his cavalry carried a desperate fight against overwhelming odds the length of Russia until finally driven back into the Caucasus Mountains, outnumbered but undefeated.

The experiences of the Prince during the last few years are so terrible as to be beyond belief, were it not that his words are substantiated by scars, etc. For instance, while aide to the Grand Duke on 18 March, 1918 he was captured by the Bolsheviks—one of his eyes was burned out and his body bears several scars of wounds which resulted from their inhuman torture. However, on the third day he killed his guards and escaped to his own command,

and was made Adjutant General under General Korniloff.

PRINCE MURAT is the laundryman on board.

He visited the ship one day last October and found life in the Navy much to his liking and, as he seemed to be a good fellow and not at all overbearing, even though the credentials presented proved him to really be a prince, it was decided to assist him temporarily. The sailors chipped in and bought him a very presentable glass eye (which has to be replaced every so often as he frequently loses them in swimming) and he was put to work on odd jobs about the ship, being supported by the crew in payment for his help.

Prince Murat is only about five feet six inches tall, but he is of extraordinary physical development, as the result of his training in the Russian Naval Academy, the School of Cavaliers at St. Petersburg and especially a school on gymnastics in which he acquired the skill and strength which stood him in such good stead during the war with the Reds.

He is every inch a prince, and even his glass eye is indistinguishable. Yet he is not snobbish and quite spontaneously salutes his Yankee shipmates with a very pronounced salaam.

I AM telling you this because Murat intends to become an American, if he is so fortunate as to pass Ellis Island. Of course, he prefers service in

Uncle Sam's Navy, as he very enthusiastically asserts in Russian, German, French and English, but the loss of an eye disqualifies him for enlistment.

Prince Murat would make a good American—during his year on the *U. S. S. Edsall* he has proven to be of excellent character, even among the many temptations of corrupt Constantinople; he is intelligent, industrious, courteous and honest. Murat is highly educated in Russian and French and has acquired a sufficient knowledge of English to facilitate comprehension of ordinary instructions.—C. W. HENSELL, Chief Yeoman, *U. S. S. Edsall*, Care Postmaster, New York.

FROM Frank Earnest of Yakima, Washington, comes a request that we ask Camp-Fire what it would think of one issue of our magazine a month devoted entirely to "Camp-Fire." I judge he means to include also "Ask Adventure" and the other departments. All right, you're asked. As I understand it, he means to continue the other issues as they are, adding a fourth. Personally I can see some strong points in favor of the idea, but some at least equally strong points against it.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Charles R. Barnes rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Cleveland, Ohio.

I was born thirty-three years ago in Akron, Ohio. My father was a Presbyterian clergyman, who held charges in several Ohio towns, including Cleveland and Zanesville. Incidentally, keep your eye on that word, Zanesville. Sam Blythe says that you can go around the world and find a man from Zanesville at every stop, including the places where the engine takes water.

Well, that city was one of my old home towns. I began to write there, at the age of sixteen, when I produced little four-line masterpieces under the direction of my father. These were announcements of church services for the local newspapers. They gave the time and the place and the text of the sermon, finishing with a loud noise condensed thus; "strangers welcome." That line was supposed to pull as many as seven extra dimes for the collection plate on sunny Sundays when the hotels were full.

In Zanesville, my education stopped. I endured it until I'd progressed half way through the Beginner's Latin Book, in the first year of the high school. That was the end. There was nothing more—no frats, no rah-rah, no nothing. I never progressed any farther than that Beginner's Latin Book.

Now, I went into journalism. The local editors considered me too erratic for the reportorial line; but I managed to get recognized as correspondent by a Chicago newspaper and one in Pittsburg. My income from this work often amounted to as much as ten dollars every two or three months. When I was nineteen, I had my first short story accepted. Ten years later McClures took the next one—or should I say, the two hundredth? I know my trunk accumulated that many during the ten years.

The wanderlust came over me in my twelfth year. I began to run away from home at that time. I used to get jobs as news butcher on railroads. Up to my twentieth year I tried doing a lot of things. I worked in a soap factory, shoveled clay in a sewer-pipe shop; was bell-boy in a hotel, night-clerk in another and errand-boy for a small dry goods store. There were other things that I did. I can't remember all of them now. Only this: at twenty I was car accountant on a belt-line railroad. This place paid me thirty dollars a month. One pay-day I tucked the thirty dollars in my pocket and bought a ticket for Pittsburg. There I bluffed a city editor into the belief that I was a good reporter. He didn't stay bluffed. At the end of a week he discharged me for being incompetent. Afterward every other city editor in Pittsburg did the same thing; it got to be a habit with those fellows.

I began to drift around the country, scoring many brilliant non-successes in my chosen profession. During that period of my life I went to Europe and saw it pretty thoroughly. All the time I was trying to write short stories. Everything I wrote was rejected.

At length I drifted to the local staff of that widely known newspaper which was founded by Petroleum V. Nasby—the Toledo (Ohio) *Blade*. While working there as police reporter I used to pick up humorous items in the hotel corridors. The city editor liked them so well that he gave me a short column of space for them every day. From that paper I went to the *Cleveland Press*. The staff humorist was taken ill and as the big noise of the sheet knew of my Toledo humor stunt, I was asked to take the joke man's place. I did it and began to grind out verse, paragraphs and jokes.

A few months later I went to Cincinnati and conducted a humor column on the *Post* there. About two years later I took charge of the one on the editorial page of the *Cleveland Leader*, left without a mother, so to speak, by the resignation of S. E. Kiser, now a Chicago poet.

I put in ten years at the newspaper business and in that time I had enough adventures to satisfy almost anybody. But they all seem so matter-of-fact that they are flat and uninteresting to me when written down. I worked all over the country, in cities and small towns. Once I started a paper and ran it. I've recovered stolen jewelry, found missing people and all that sort of thing. One time I was nudged out of a Wisconsin town at the point of a sheriff's revolver for reporting a jail-break and putting the blame where it belonged. In Berlin I discovered an Anarchistic plot to shoot the Kaiser. This ought to make a good story but it doesn't. When I told what I knew to a fresh lieutenant at the palace, he told me to run along home and stop being a pest.

I began to write for *Puck* and *Judge* and other publications that would stand for verse. I ended by going to New York to live. I was twenty-nine when I began selling stories again. I quit writing poetry. I haven't been guilty since.—CHARLES R. BARNES.

AT A recent Camp-Fire we had the program of the Federation of Uncle Sam's Voters. Since we hope some day to work out an effective organization of our own unless we find one already in existence to

which we can subscribe, it is well to examine any organization for better citizenship and better conditions that seems to merit careful scrutiny. Will any of you who know of such organizations bring them to our attention?

This time we have the Legion of American Watchmen, brought to my attention by Henry E. Montgomery. I do not know Mr. Montgomery and can judge him only by the principles and ideals here set forth. As you will notice, the appeal is to organizations as well as individuals. The statement is prefaced with this: "Those things which are worth living for—dying for—are worth voting for."

The statement itself, copyrighted 1923, Legion of American Watchmen, Inc.:—

THERE are numbers of organizations designed to perpetuate the memory and standards of those Americans who made our country the shining marvel of the ages. There are millions of men banded together in more or less numerous groups committed to the propositions that—

Law and order.

Protection of the rights of the weak.

Lawful rule of the majority.

Sanctity of the family group.

Freedom from interference with honesty which avails itself of opportunity—are principles *worth fighting for, worth living for, worth dying for*:—are things to teach and to inculcate by precept and example.

But to these men there are no means, aside from the *ballot*, of legally enforcing their principles and rights upon their fellow citizens.

We believe that through the L. A. W. we can concentrate the force now lying dormant in societies committed to service for American ideals, *and make that force effective*.

IT IS realized that patriotic societies are more or less politically futile. They are composed of men who, by tradition and inheritance, know that upon them rests the responsibility of handing down to posterity the government of laws founded upon ideals of human liberty, fabricated in pain and cemented by blood in seven epoch-making wars. Such men stand appalled at the spectacle of Corruption using statutes to pander to greed, vice, murder, theft.

They realize that their children are being reared in an atmosphere of contempt for law; an atmosphere which is not only noisome, but which promises to abort every American ideal which we have been brought up to revere. Such men realize that they are a part of a great, inarticulate majority; a majority which quietly takes off its coat, picks up its rifle and defends this Government in time of emergency—in short, which dies for its country. They realize that this majority, the emergency having passed, dumbly returns to its private affairs and forgets, until the next crisis, that participation in the business of government is as much the duty of decent citizens as is fighting in time of war.

We believe we have found a means to impress the

desires, standards and ideals of decent citizens upon the Body Politic through the *Legion of American Watchmen*.

We believe the remedy for most of the ills which afflict this nation is to be found in a militant effort to purify our politics irrespective of any political affiliations, to insist upon a rigid, honest enforcement of laws, and adequate measures of national defense.

THE people who have formed the Legion of American Watchmen are inviting members of your Society and all other patriotic societies, civil service organizations, American fraternal orders and individual decent citizens, to join them in insisting that a concerted effort be made to drag this Government of ours out of its present slough of mismanagement—hypocrisy—weakness—negligence—cowardice—crime.

There are four fields of work in which the organization can begin operations:

Immigration Law.—Congress has made an honest effort to bar undesirable aliens, and the immigration authorities are striving to enforce this law. Their efforts are being set at naught by organizations dominated by alien elements in possession of millions of money, whose object is to colonize this country with followers who are members of the army of revolution.

No intelligent American fails to realize that the present era of unrest amongst American working men is due to the sinister activities of alien enemies. It is also generally recognized that in every phase of American life there is to be found the same demoralizing and disrupting influence. It is likewise recognized that there is a definite, well-organized and wealthy influence back of this movement.

One way to weaken this sinister force is to stop the inflow of radicals. Our Government realizes this and the Legion of American Watchmen proposes to uphold the arms of our Government.

Military Training.—The creation, operation and enforcement of a sensible, workable and adequate military Act seems imperative. At present, the army of the United States is scattered in small units, under-manned and so badly placed that in case of revolt it would be badly and bloodily handicapped. The National Guard organization, presumed to be federalized, is at low ebb, both in numbers and personnel. The officers of the Reserve Corps form a splendid organization but have no file on which to work.

It is to be noted in this connection that the National Guard of Wisconsin has been wiped out of existence, and that the National Guard units in all parts of the country are away below normal strength. It is significant that efforts to enact anti-firearms acts, similar to the Sullivan Law in New York, are spreading throughout the States and are sponsored by mysterious elements who are not disclosed, but who are spending much money and obtaining much support.

Remember that political interest in military affairs is based upon the vote. And the soldier vote is negligible until a crisis.

Postal Regulations.—It is notorious that upwards of Six Hundred Million Dollars is lost to the general public every year through the use of the mail by swindlers. It is notorious that the Post Office Department frequently finds it almost impossible to secure convictions of such swindlers because of their political strength. Our organization can well

lend its influence to insist that those apprehended and indicted for crime shall have speedy trial and, if convicted, rigorous punishment.

Not only are the postal regulations set at naught by promoters of fraudulent securities and by quacks, but radicals of the most vicious kind habitually use the mails for propaganda.

It is realized that there is an alliance of the swindlers who use the mails, the corrupt politicians who pander to the lowest passions of the mob and the elements who are sending through the mails seditious literature. Many of the baser foreign-language publications are supported by the advertising of swindlers and quacks.

If we can co-operate with the postal authorities in impressing upon the minds of criminals that the use of the mails is a privilege and not a right, we will be materially helping in the cause of good government.

Volstead Law.—It is alleged, even among those of intelligence, that this law is pernicious because it is so badly framed that its enforcement is most difficult. However, the attitude of many decent citizens toward this law breeds contempt for all laws, and any effort to repeal it is neutralized by the nourishment derived from its violation by lawless, radical and enemy alien elements.

We believe that the best way to repeal a bad law is to insist upon its strict enforcement.

In fighting for the enforcement of law, the Legion purposes working along the following lines:

Political.—By enjoining on members the importance of as active a participation in local politics as possible. This involves membership and support of local political clubs, voting of primaries, and the insistence of members that only candidates of the first quality of citizenship be nominated and elected.

Publicity.—It is the purpose of the Legion to publish an organ and to supplement such publication with bulletins containing information for the membership. An effort to keep in touch with the press is a part of this work as well as the maintenance of a correspondence bureau.

Intelligence.—The headquarters of the Legion will secure and collate as much information as possible so that members can be informed of the necessity of certain lines of action.

This is an ambitious program. It is dependent upon a large membership and your active, earnest support to become effective.

It should be possible to hold a convention in New York State before the next election in order to secure a declaration by leaders of both the dominant parties on the vitally important question of law enforcement.

We invite your participation in this work.

The Legion of American Watchmen should be utilized by associations such as yours, as a vehicle through which they can effectually manifest their desire to preserve and perpetuate American ideals.

Please also send us the names of those for whom you can vouch, who might be invited to join the Legion. Please remember that there are no applications. Each member is selected after inquiry.

Will you not write and give us your views?

Remember to put *None but Americans on Guard.*

Address all communications, and make all remittances payable to:—Henry E. Montgomery, Chairman, Organization Committee Legion of American Watchmen, Inc., Room 722—Two Rector Street, New York.

BEING in doubt as to several points, I wrote Mr. Montgomery concerning them. Here is his reply:

November 8, 1923.

"Free speech, free assemblage and free press" are fundamental means through which citizens may reach decisions regarding the ballot. We must be free, though, through this means to tell American citizens how much hypocrisy and rascality and treason utilizes "free assemblage, free speech and free press."

ONE of the reasons we are a great nation lies in the fact that America as a matter of principle is committed to maintain "freedom from interference with honesty which avails itself of opportunity." Honest business and honest men should by no means be confused with rapacity and the kind of business which avails itself of immoral means. If capital is honest, its vested rights should be protected against the disingenuous efforts of demagogues to hamper it for vote catching and competitive purposes.

The unholy alliance which exists between Bolshevism, petty swindling, bootleggers and the baser forms of political corruption finds the use of the mails a necessity. Political interference with justice has made the punishment for violation of the Postal Regulations extremely difficult despite the fact that the postal inspection department is the most efficient investigating body in the world. Quacks, crooks and swindlers are the main support in the advertising columns of many of the radical foreign language newspapers. The use of the mails is a privilege and not a right.

THE L. A. W. has no concern with the political faith of its members so long as the party to which they belong is an American party. Among our members are Republicans and Democrats. All we ask of them is that they insist that their nominees for office shall be men of integrity and intelligence, and that if the men who are elected violate their oaths of office they be punished, while those public servants who are striving to fulfil their obligations should be supported.

Enclosed you will find the platform upon which we are operating and an explanation of our objects.

In sum, we are desirous of making it dangerous to bore from within or without and dangerous also to fail to enforce the law and to plot a revolution of force.—HENRY E. MONTGOMERY.

THE platform and explanation of which he speaks follows:

In order that there may be no misapprehension regarding the attitude of the L. A. W. toward LAW a further explanation is due you. The entire policy is comprehended in the platform upon which we are operating. These principles are as follows:

TO MAINTAIN unswerving allegiance to the United States of America, and to defend the rights of all citizens or duly authorized dwellers within these United States, irrespective of race, color or religion.

To pledge his or her services to the United States against all aggression, sedition, disloyalty or attempts to overthrow the Government, originating

either from within or without, and in an emergency to immediately volunteer for service to our country in any capacity for which he or she may be deemed best fitted.

To perform his or her full duty as a citizen, so far as possible, registering and voting at all primaries as well as at all municipal, State and Federal elections, no matter what his or her party affiliations may be, and to acquaint and satisfy him or herself, so far as is possible, with the qualifications of all candidates for office, and do his or her utmost to prevent the nomination, election or maintenance in office of any unfit person.

WE ARE concerned as an organization with these Questions:

Can the United States Government enforce its laws?

Have American citizens the right to choose the laws they may decide to obey?

May law officers choose the laws which they are called upon to enforce?

Shall statutes now in force be used to exploit the United States by international bankers, bootleggers and Bolsheviks?

Shall certain types of criminals continue to operate as a privileged class profiting through the violation and evasion of laws which are enforced only against those who are not politically organized and capitalized?

Shall we continue to recklessly cumber our statute books and clog our courts with half-baked legislation designed as vote catchers?

We shall demand that our political leaders of all parties answer fairly and squarely these questions and we shall ask the voters of this country to apply the intelligence so secured to these dominant political questions.

The purposes in general seem excellent, The actual organization and its practical working methods are yet to be defined. I do not understand that membership is limited to Republicans and Democrats, though this point is not clear. While certain prime essentials of good citizenship are emphasized, I could wish for at least some presentation of the general nature and obligations of good citizenship. These are merely my personal views. Each of you will form his own.

It is good—and significant—that organizations of this kind are springing up. The need is great and the impulse to meet it is evident. If all the right-meaning Americans can find a right common ground and unite upon it, our country's affairs will take a very decided turn for the better. But such things are not easily brought to pass. Any betterment means real work by all of us.

THIS is going a long way back, but I find I've failed to correct a mis-statement I made at Camp-Fire. When we published "The Night of Escape" and "Sir

Judas," by Rafael Sabatini. I stated that, while they had appeared in book form in England, they had had no American publication, book or magazine, in this country. They were bought by us on this basis from a literary agent acting in good faith, but Mr. G. Stewart Harris of Pasadena writes that he has a copy of the book containing them, "Historical Nights' Entertainment," published by J. B. Lippincott, Philadelphia, some years ago.

I'm sorry for the mistake.

CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE, who is Procurement Planning Agent for the Signal Corps in the New York District, writes that although the idea is somewhat prevalent that Big Business profited hugely through the War, it is nevertheless a fact that some of them at least "gave until it hurt."

One immense corporation, he says, which operates about fifty plants, nearly all of which produced war materials, had a directors' meeting soon after war was declared and decided to take no profits at all from the Government. It is a matter of record that this policy was never amended and the corporation's net loss amounted to approximately three million dollars.

A small concern, making wire products, got one contract for \$990,000, in 1918. The contract was legal and binding. The plant was expanded and began to grind out thousands of miles of insulated wire. Then came the sudden termination of all need for such a commodity on Nov. 11th. The day after the Armistice was signed the president and secretary of the concern, like the true patriots they were, wired a cancellation of the contract to be acted upon at the discretion of the War Department. Of course they lost the business, for the instructions that came back were to "cease making."

No one is, I hope, foolish enough to believe that no capitalists "gave till it hurt." There isn't a certain degree of wealth at which a man ceases to be a good American. These two examples are refreshing and doubtless there are other similar cases. Unfortunately there are many examples of the other kind—cases in which corporations and individuals exacted the last pound of flesh from America through its Government and too often added another pound of flesh by means of a hard bargain and maybe still another pound of flesh by sheer crookedness. Some of these profiteers were plain vultures, but I wonder whether others of them weren't merely lacking in brains—lacking the understanding to let them realize they were enemies of their country, traitors to her, preying upon her resources

as surely as the enemy on the battlefield preyed on them.

It is good to be reminded that there were at least some whom greed could not make forget that they were first of all men and loyal Americans.

A LETTER to me from J. Allan Dunn of our writers' brigade, a letter meant to be passed on to all of Camp-Fire. In the last part of it he is "all het up" as he puts it.

Patterson, New York.

There has been a heap of *hombres* rising on their hind legs from time to time around the Camp Fire declaring about the relative demerits of rattlers, Gila monsters, centipedes, tarantulas, scorpions, etcetera. Some of 'em hail from the western parts of the old U. S. A., some of 'em from Central and South America, some from Africa's burning sands or from the isles and atolls of the south Seas.

Each tells of his personal experience and is inclined to lay down the law that way. Sometimes they speak of others in terms of tenderfeet, New Johns, Johnny Newcomes and the like. One gent rises recently to remark that these are the folk who only *think* they know.

NOW—hold on and quit rearing. Centipedes, poison snakes, spiders and scorpions are scattered far and wide over the landscape. The devil flung the handful of trouble indiscriminately. I have met with them myself in many, many latitudes. Aye, and longitudes. And . . .

The degree of trouble is in ratio to the conditions. A great deal depends upon a man's blood. In the South Seas there are many places—New Guinea, for example—where the slightest scratch becomes an ulcer. Think what the dug-in claws of a centipede mean under those circumstances, with a man's blood already swarming with fever-bugs handed to him by the mosquitos.

I have seen a woman's arm slough for two weeks after a centipede got busy in Honolulu. She was in apparently normal health at the time.

Take a man with his vitality sucked up by sun, shortage of water, bum grub and hard trailing in the desert and let *anything* bite him that has any acidity in it. Men have died of a bee-sting. Others recommend it for the rheumatism. Men have died from rattlers—aided very often by overstimulation induced by hooch; many, many others have not died.

I saw one chap die on the train on the way back from the Santa Cruz mountains to San Francisco some sixteen years ago. It developed that he had killed the snake, cut off its head, fooled with the decapitated member and got bitten on the end of his finger. Sucking and a tourniquet arrested the march of the poison. Then they got on the train and by and bye the tourniquet bothered him so much the poor chump insisted on taking it off. It was a hot day, he was in a ripe condition and went *pronto* into coma—into eternity.

THEREFORE I do opine, out of the experience of a fairly long, and thank the little gods, still active life, that no hard and fast rule should be laid

down as to the deadliness of this or that poison carrier.

It depends upon the *temperature* of the place where it happened, the *temperature* of the man bitten—likewise his *temperament*. The condition of his *vitality*, the matter of *asepsis* and *antisepsis*.

To carry the thing a little far for sake of illustration, you might as well start an argument about the death dealing capacity of a rusty nail.

And that's that.

NOW there has another *hombre* been shooting his venom concerning Tahiti and knocking Jack London, Fred O'Brien and Lewis R. Freeman. He acknowledged he knows nothing about Tahiti save from correspondence and cites that he wrote to Darling while he was alive.

No need to justify Jack London. His record was an open book. He never wrote about anything he had not experienced and no one ever caught him out in a mistatement. Neither did he write much about Tahiti.

Mr. Freeman was one of the most distinguished correspondents of the late war and honored by the British to such an extent that his accounts of naval battles and maneuvers have not only been published in the conservative *Cornhill Magazine* but authorized.

I met Mr. Freeman when he was starting on a South Sea cruise with Mr. Sinclair of Los Angeles in the *Lurline*. He is another man who writes only of what he sees. He has written comparatively little fiction. I don't think he ever claimed to be a trader, but he has gone through all that he has written of.

As to Darling, he is dead. But he knew nothing of Tahiti save what he learned from his little shack whence he sallied out to make a nuisance of himself on every incoming vessel. I was in Honolulu when he first landed in the South Seas and rode up Fort Street on his bicycle, only to be pinched by Sheriff Brown's orders and told to approximate decent clothing in a civilized community. His main trouble was ego.

Now C. Brown Jr., of "A. A.," has already flayed this *hombre* a bit. I imagine that C. Brown, with myself, would like the chance of doing more than merely saying what we just think for the aforesaid *hombre's* manners in dragging in the name of the widow of a writer who has passed on and yet still lives because genius is immortal.

But—why waste half a column—why waste the monotype metal—the cost of setting and all the rest of it—let alone our time—on the rotten letter of a chap who slams Fred O'Brien, whom also I knew well in Honolulu somewhere around a quarter of a century ago; who throws dirt at London and Freeman, says that he is tired of hard work, exhibits the instincts and manners of a beachcomber, yips that, because he was born in New Zealand and was almost raised in Fiji no one can tell him much of Tahiti and—hasn't got the guts to back up his cheap expletives by permitting his name to be printed?

As a member of Camp-Fire and of the Writer's Brigade, as one who every week acts as an ex-officio "Ask Adventure" man, I rise to propose that letters like these be not given the dignity of type or of answer. The *hombre* does not write as if he was yet dry back of the ears, nevertheless, why—when his letter deliberately calls the top rank of writers

by invectives which doubtless he did not leave blank in his letter, and as deliberately exhibits in his letter his general makeup—why air his stinking linen on *our* line?

I know what he needs.

And I put my proposition as a motion.

I get many letters from chaps who don't want their name published in case the letters should be used in Camp-Fire. Many of them may have real reasons and I'm inclined to amend my motion and make it that no letters of such evident vituperative content and foolish accusation—and no letters where the writer wants his name concealed—be published in *our* columns.

We are all proud of *our* columns. We like 'em clean. This *hombre* is the sort who delights to scribble his moniker on cesspool covers but conceals it when there might be a comeback. He needs a mental bath and I wouldn't wonder but that he needs a physical one also.

You may elide a lot of this letter though I know you are agreeing with it as you read it. But, as Uncle Frank would say, "I'm all het up over the skunk."—J. ALLAN DUNN.

Probably most of us would vote aye on Mr. Dunn's motion. The letter in question would not have been printed if it had not been followed by the reply of C. Brown, Jr., of "A.A." contradicting the fellow's opinions. In effect, the two letters together constitute a presentation of the question of the merits of the writers mentioned and a judgment in their favor. Even without Mr. Brown's reply, the fellow loses his own case by his presentation of it.

AS TO the general case of people who write to "A. A." or "Camp-Fire" and ask not to have their names printed. As stated before, we'd always rather have a man say his say over his own name. But sometimes there are sound reasons for not using his name, reasons carrying the taint of neither shame or cowardice. If a letter is vituperative it is generally barred out, though sometimes I've printed them when the vituperation was directed at the magazine or me personally, or at some general subject not involving personalities. Sometimes, too, as in the particular case before us, there could be no better word in favor of what is attacked than the attack itself. When a man writes so bitter a letter that he's unwilling to sign his name to it the chances are very good that he will ruin the case he attempts to present and line up decent, thinking people on the side of his intended victim.

I've been speaking of those who sign their names to their letters but ask not to have their names printed. The fellow who

doesn't give his name at all is a more acute example. I haven't any respect for these anonymous birds, but they make me sore and, to be quite frank, I'm generally at least tempted to print their letters, for an anonymous letter is such easy picking! In fact, it picks itself and a little extra picking from some one else just naturally wrecks the darned thing.

But as to the general question. I'm for barring out vituperative letters in general, if the vituperation is personal in aim. In fact, that is already our general rule. We try to keep Camp-Fire a friendly gathering. But I'd like to continue to have a little leeway and be able to make an occasional exception to the rule.

AS TO not publishing any letters unless the writer's real and full name is attached, that too is a good general rule, but here, too, I want leeway. As said above, omission of the name is sometimes fully justified. Sometimes the reason is apparent on the face of things and often the man explains to me his reasons. In the latter case you see the letter but not the reasons—often, in the nature of things, giving the reasons would be more or less equivalent to giving the name.

What I mean is that I have data for judging that I can't pass on to you. The writer may be in public office and, while quite willing, as an individual, to say his say over his own name, feels a justified restraint in so doing while a public official. Or he may live in a very small community where he'd be bored to death by questions afterward. Or a man of affairs aching to talk to us, who will understand, of the days when he followed the path of the itching foot, yet knowing that some of his present associates will *not* understand.

There is the other kind, too,—the kind who, if you will, have cause to be ashamed of printing their names. You will remember letters from comrades in penitentiaries. Who can blame them for not wanting their names printed and who wants them excluded from our Camp-Fire? They may or may not be worse than the rest of us. Who wants to throw the first stone? Being outside a penitentiary isn't in itself a warrant of worth, nor is being in one necessarily a damning fact. Even among the out-and-out crooks the majority nurse at least half-hope or half-intention of

some day becoming straight. It doesn't help them or society to kick them and their half-intentions away from our Camp-Fire. Also, there is good in all men and they wouldn't want to come up to our clean blaze if the good in them weren't urging.

In the cases of some of those whose letters have come to us from penitentiaries I know the intention of reform is real, not a fantasy—know from others of our Camp-Fire who are helping them (no, none of the charity stuff) how earnestly they are working and preparing to earn an honest living on release. If they want to talk cleanly to clean men, do you want me to bar their letters from "Camp-Fire" because they are reluctant to advertise their names and make it all the harder to run straight afterward?

I HAD a friend who was a burglar. If he is still alive I hope he is still my friend, but I have not heard from or of him since the war broke out. He had served various terms when I first got in touch with him and has served at least one since. Have heard from him from many places and under many names, though there was only one time when I could talk to him other than by letter. He never had anything to say about reforming, but I think he would have given a good deal to be back on the straight path and I tell you he was eaten up with loneliness, for association with ordinary, every-day people. I hope I didn't need his case to make me weigh the good along with the bad in people who've gone to the other side of iron bars, but if Camp-Fire ever gets so nasty nice it refuses to give such folk at least a *chance* to show themselves decent comrades around our blaze, why, when it throws them out I'm going along.

There were many fine qualities in this man, and much quiet manly strength. Indeed, it was an expression of this side of him that first got us acquainted. I think criminals sort of make me think of politicians and somehow this one recalls a certain nationally prominent politician with whom I once ate a meal. It was a purely social association, he was pleasant enough and he's not considered any worse than the average politician, but curiously enough I look back on the occasion with an odd feeling of shame. I don't feel any in looking back on my criminal friend. I'd trust

the latter unhesitatingly with my purse or with things more valuable—no, I'm not a — fool, but I'd sure think a long time before trusting the politician to any large extent. Yes, I'll admit I'm prejudiced. But my hunch is that the criminal would prove himself a straight comrade at our Camp-Fire and that the other fellow wouldn't.

IF THE man who once taught a deserted school is still alive and sees this, I hope he will write to me. I'm afraid he's passed on or I'd have heard from him.

I've rambled around, but after all it all has to do with why I don't want to bar letters from "Camp-Fire" simply because the writers don't always want their names printed.

Sign your names by all means unless there are very real reasons against it.

Camp-Fire is for frankness—our custom is to speak openly from where the firelight can fall on us, not from back in the shadows. But very few rules can be laid down about human beings without needing exceptions.
—A. S. H.

AT ONE of our Camp-Fires the expression "company of cavalry," applied to the times of the Custer Massacre, was questioned. Here's a bit of information from an Army officer:

I note Sgt. Ryan's interview and the statement by somebody by way of introduction that "Ryan is the only cavalryman he ever heard of who referred to his troop as a 'company.'" Ryan is quite correct, however, for in 1876 what is now known as a troop was then called a "company" of cavalry; and what is now termed a squadron was then "a battalion."

SERVICES TO OUR READERS



Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the first and third issues of each month. Full list in first issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you post-paid, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friends or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, not to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure back through 1918, and occasional copies before that.

WILL SELL: Aug., Sept., Oct., 1911; Jan., July, Aug., Sept., Oct., 1913. These are in excellent condition. The following have the covers missing: Mar., July, 1911; June, July, 1912; Mar., June, 1913; Jan. 1914.—Address **ROLAND FUGMAN, 1676 Lee Road, Cleveland Hts., Ohio.**

WILL SELL: July, 1917, 1st Apr., 1st Dec., 1918; 1st Aug., 1920; Nov. 30th, 1921; Sept. 30th, 1922; May 10th, 1923; Aug. 30th, 1923.—Address **ALGER JENKINS, 190 Summit Avenue, Upper Montclair, N. J.**

WILL SELL: Back issues at five cents a copy.—Address **L. N. THORNTON, 15 Bates St., N.W., Washington, D. C.**

WILL SELL: Twenty-five issues of 1915, 1916, 1917.—Address **ELDON B. GREENLAND, Aberdeen, Maryland.**

WILL SELL: Every issue from Vol. 1, No. 1, to date. Good condition. Best offer.—Address **R. DIECKING, 868 N. 19th St., Phila., Pa.**

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it with the manuscript; do not send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be type-written double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, unstamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, not to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(See *Lost Trails*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addressee

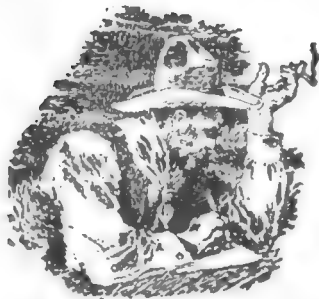
Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask *Adventure*.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure Magazine* by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for general information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections,

subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and full postage, not attached, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.
2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualification and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.
5. Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.

1. The Sea. Part 1 American Waters
BRIAN BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (See next section.)

2. The Sea. Part 2 British Waters
CAPT. A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men below to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea. Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESBERG, 3633 New Hampshire Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts. Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits

CAPT. A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (See next section.)

5. Islands. Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, *Adventure* Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands. Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Piddling Star*, Piddling, New Zealand.

Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (Postage two cents.)

7. South Sea Islands. Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumotu, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomon, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).

CHARLES BROWN, JR., P. O. Box 306, San Francisco, Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
FRANK MORTON, care *Trinidad* magazine, 19 Castlereagh St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (Postage ten cents.)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (Postage ten cents.)

11. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartermaster, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting,

★ (Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached)

13. Japan

GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo

CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan

GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters

CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, P. O. Box 2882, Tampa, Fla. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan

GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria

ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✦ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo

CHARLES BEADLE, care of Ramsey Direct Service, 44 Rue d'Hauteville, Paris. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (Postage 12 cents.)

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand

CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✦ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East

R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (Postage 3 cents.)

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco

GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli

CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, Morgan City, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan

W. T. MOFFAT, Sudan Customs, Sinkat, Red Sea Province, Africa, Sudan. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (Postage 5 cents.)

26. Turkey and Asia Minor

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

27. Bulgaria, Roumania

(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

28. Albania

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

29. Jugo-Slavia and Greece

LIEUT. WILLIAM JENNA, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

30. Scandinavia

ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland

FRED F. FLEISCHER, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

32. Great Britain

THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

33. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

34. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at

57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing. Questions regarding employment not answered.

35. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

36. Central America

CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

37. Mexico Part 1 Northern

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

38. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California

C. R. MAHAFFEY, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

39. ✦ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin

S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (Postage 3 cents.)

40. ✦ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario

HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (Postage 3 cents.)

41. ✦ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario

GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (Postage 3 cents.)

42. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District

T. P. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

43. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta

ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

44. ✦ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin

REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (Postage 3 cents.)

45. ✦ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec

JAS. P. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (Postage 3 cents.)

46. Alaska

THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, Larkspur, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

47. Baffinland and Greenland

VICTOR SHAW, 2933 W. 25th Ave., Denver, Colo. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

48. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.

E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

49. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico

H. F. ROBINSON, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

50. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.

FRANK MIDDLETON, 509 Fremont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

51. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains

CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

✦ (Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps—in Mr. Beadle's case twelve cents—NOT attached)

52. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country

(Editor to be appointed.) Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

53. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.

J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

54. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River

GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (See next section.)

58. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boat-ing, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

59. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville

HOWARD A. SHANNON, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

DONALD McNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

VICTOR SHAW, 2933 W. 25th Ave., Denver, Colo. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers,

cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

LIEUT.-COL. W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

FRED. F. FLEISCHER, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. *United States*: Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign*: Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General*: Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

I.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

ARTHUR WOODWARD, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

J.—STANDING INFORMATION

For Camp-Fire Stations write J. COX, care *Adventure*.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiver-ships in Santa Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C. National Rifle Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif.

Born in New Hampshire. First adventure was trip with my mother to Paris, Ky., where father was stationed as surgeon in charge Union Hospital; he saved many a poor — from having leg or arm cut off, did not booze, knew his business as surgeon.

At Paris had fifth birthday and, having escaped from woolly-headed "Topsy," the nurse, managed to get into house where Moseby's "gorillas" had made camp two hours before. They were the roughest cusses the Lord ever let a little boy get acquainted with, but were kind to me although they examined me to see if I had any little horns growing out of my skull; told me they had heard that all Yankees had horns. After convincing them that I had nothing of the kind, was asked many questions about Boston, and being far from a backward child, so much enthusiasm was pumped into them, they stated that they'd be — if they'd kill any more Yankees if all were like me.

Then my father found me; I told him that one of my new friends had a hurt hand; the hand was dressed, and those rough fellows never molested anything belonging to the hospital. Buttons cut from tattered uniforms were given me as presents; I gave my toys in return. If they had remained in Paris a week longer maybe I could have arranged with them to join the Northern forces.

Primary and grammar schools at Lynn, Mass.; private school was Chauncy Hall, Boston, Mass.; 1875 went into machine shop; attended Centennial, nine days in Machinery Hall, one day for the balance of exhibition; 1877, trip of ten days on train, Boston, Mass., to Sacramento, thence by steamer *Amador* to San Francisco, Calif.; later, by schooner *R. B. Hayes* to Oregon, and later made trips to Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and northern Mexico; then, realizing that more "know how" was a good thing, got busy with studies, entered Boston Massachusetts Institute of Technology in mechanics, mining and chemistry and side studies. Built and ran a steam carriage in Lynn, Mass., 1881; found seventy-five thousand inhabitants dead ag'in' the idea; paid milkman one hundred dollars for spilled milk, cans and wagon and for bathing the street with fairly good milk; put my machine in back yard; told mossbacks that horses would be in cans inside ten years; proved not to be so, for the world moves with much slowness, and he that is ahead of the game is more or less out of luck.

After leaving Tech. in 1885 you might have found me at Dahlonga, Ga., in charge of mining work for New York interests. New York and Brooklyn in metallurgical work for several years.

1904 found me in Porto Rico building eighty-six-foot dam across Corozal River, also ditch and pipeline three miles long, also a twenty-four-inch inverted siphon twelve hundred feet long with which

to operate a double sluice-line one hundred feet long and twenty-four inches sides and bottom.

Got this contract because other bidders said, "Must take big white gang to do the work." I said, "The only thing worth while in life is trying to do something you can't, and doing it." Board of directors gave me the contract, which I finished as per the specification. BUT with bull-cart transportation, swimming nests of pipe through the flooded river—especially the twenty-four-inch, sixteen-foot long—and transporting it up into the mountain region on men's shoulders with thirty-five cents per day labor, certainly it was a trial. All the work had to be directed in Spanish and Porto Rican lingo. The dam, which has stood up-against all the torrential freshets—with big trees with their menacing tops and roots racing down at high speed—is now to be used as a nucleus for a small electric-lighting plant.

Did my bit as chief engineer at the Quarantine Station on the Milaflores Island near San Juan, P. R., during last war-time.

Have ninety per cent. record on final examinations in American School of Aviation, Chicago.

There are several other trips and incidents that might be mentoined but think this is enough for the present.—CHARLES BELL EMERSON.

Following is a short sketch of my (sad, sad) life up to date.

Born Oct. 6, 1883, two miles above Ward's Mill in Wild Cat Valley, Va., which is across Wallen's Ridge from Big Stone Gap, to which place my folks moved when I was five years old. Saw personally and at first hand the exciting times of the local boom at this town, which John Fox, Jr., made famous in some of his novels. Graduated from private schools and high school at the age of fifteen and took some several grades that were added by Professor Sheppe for my benefit.

Early developed a trait for running away from home and even as a boy in school had covered ten or fifteen States as a tramp, doing the stunt in real "blowed-in-the-bottle" style with tramps and yeggs. Studied telegraphy and went to work on the Cumberland Valley Division of the L. & N. at sixteen, became a "boomer" and worked for sixty-eight railroads, Western Union, Postal—traveling into every State in the U. S. and many times into Canada, where I worked for the C. P. R., C. N. R. and G. T. P. R.—flew off at a tangent into Mexico, where I worked on the construction of the S. P. de Mexico and then hit the trail.

Made the trip overland to Guatemala City, where I became a soldier of fortune and was aide-de-camp for General Lee Christmas until he resigned his commission. Made the trail almost all the way from there to Colon and was rather battered when I hit the I. C. C. for work. Was employed as craneman and derrick runner at various points along the canal.

Quit and started out to see South America. Did the job thoroughly. Made the overland trip from Rio to Montevideo with several side trips and several sorts of jobs. Went by ship to Punta de Arenas and started working north. It was several years before I landed at the quarantine station at Balboa; and I had done almost everything that a man can turn his hand to, from putting in accounting-systems to bossing a gang of natives and singing in cabarets.

Got a job on the Panama R. R. and worked for a

few months as telegrapher; went to Nicaragua to accept position as auditor of the National Railways and Steamships of the country. Got tired of prosperity and quit.

Worked north and hit San Francisco some months later after passing up through the revolution in Mexico, which was rather hot at the time. Since then have done various stunts, not the least of which is writing yarns for half a dozen magazines and trying to read through a public library.

I have met some mighty fine and some mighty wise men in hobo camps and on trails, and I have met some hard guys and yeggs. Have had a millionaire for a pal, tramped for weeks with a prince who is now king of one of the best-known countries of Europe, and have mixed with all sorts and colors of men and women. As a side issue I have always studied and read all books that came to my hand with a particular hobby for psychology, philosophy, biology and languages.

Further deponent sayeth not.—EDGAR YOUNG.

Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

Born in southeastern Ontario, few miles from the Ottawa River—descended on father's side from first lumbermen on the Ottawa, people who would have me to believe that the blood of Lincoln runs in my veins. At any rate they came from the Eastern States—probably United Empire Loyalists. Learned the printing trade in my home district, chucked it for the lumber camps in Quebec, though had worked in village sawmill off and on for many months. Quebec got too cold, and I shot across to southeastern Ontario and the printing business again.

Then began a sort of tramp experience from point to point in Ontario, during which I was journeyman printer, foreman, editor, reporter, managing editor of weeklies and semi-weeklies—got as far north as the Canadian Soo as a partner in a job office. Trekged back south to southwestern Ontario, bought a small village weekly, next year bought another, next year leased a third and ran a string something after Lord Northcliffe—*something after*—played out, doctors told me to go where it was dry and I went back to home district, started a paper, while two brothers were doing their bits "over there," shut up shop, came south, bought the Deseronto *Post*, moved down plant. I am here with five years behind me.

Have hunted, fished, canoed in various parts of the territory I cover—lumbering runs in my blood—my father was sawmill man, jobber, etc.—spent two Winters of my young life in "the shanty"—have worked on the farm, know something about aviation from three years' experience around the local aerodrome and inherent curiosity, can tell some minerals, etc., etc.

And that's about all—save that I've had short stories in *Canada Monthly*, *Canadian Courier*, *All-Story*, *Adventure* (once), *Rod and Gun in Canada* (which was featuring my stuff). Collaborated with George L. Catton for fiction in *Adventure*, *Argosy*, etc. Age 41 last 29th October, Scotch, Presbyterian, Mason. Owner and publisher of *The Post*, Deseronto, Ontario.—HARRY M. MOORE.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Orange-Growing in South Africa

A GOOD chance for the man with capital:

Question:—"I should be glad if you can give me any information on orange-growing in South Africa. I am twenty-six years of age and unmarried and shall not be able to proceed there for at least a year. What capital is required? And if possible would it be a good idea to put in about six months, say, on an orange estate in California learning what I could as a hired hand? I am accustomed to handling native laborers, having had five years in India, and would appreciate any remarks on the supply of same in South Africa.

Do you know anything of the Lebediela Estate in the Waterberg District of the Transvaal?

Is capital of \$10,000 sufficient to start, and on what scale?"—C. A. THORNTON, Vancouver, B. C.

Answer, by Capt. Franklin:—"I am sending you a booklet on orange-growing in South Africa which may explain everything. It would be a splendid thing for you to put in six months in California learning what you can as a hired hand.

Mr. Stewart Ponsford, % Riverside, Grantham, Lincs, England, can give you full particulars as to the Lebediela Estate in the Waterberg District of the Transvaal.

I have forwarded a copy of your letter to the Agent General, 32 Victoria St., London, S. W., England.

Ten thousand dollars capital would enable you to start very well in orange-growing in South Africa.

Learning to Fly

SCHOOLS where the tuition fee is a dollar for every minute you'r in the air:

Question:—"I am very much interested in flying and would appreciate your answers to the following questions:

1. Is it worth while to learn to fly?
2. What chance is there of getting employment after learning to fly?
3. What are some of the schools at which flying may be learned; the tuition, length of course, etc?
4. I have been considering attending the R. C. Diggins School in Chicago. Do you think it is all right?
5. What are some aviation magazines, and where can I obtain them?"—F. X. MOSHENROSE, Villa Park, Ill.

Answer, by Maj. Schauffler:—"1. At present and for the next year or two unless you want to take the time and the money and can afford to do so I would say, "No." There are too many young men at the present time in the United States who are expert pilots as a result of the late war who are looking for positions as pilots. These men are for the most part excellent pilots, and there is no demand for their services.

2. Practically none. The few commercial companies that are now operating in the United States employ only men of great experience, and their waiting lists for positions run into the hundreds. To obtain employment as a pilot with a commercial aeronautical company a man must have had at least one thousand hours in the air, and that is a long, long time.

3. There are a number of very good flying schools in this country, and you can find their advertisements in any aeronautical magazine, such as *Aerial Age*, *U. S. Air Service Magazine*, *Aeronautical Digest*, *The Ace*. Any school advertised in the above mentioned magazines will be reliable. The usual tuition is about one dollar a minute, and they usually turn a man "solo" in about four hundred minutes. However, when a man has had only four hundred minutes in the air he is more dangerous to himself and to others than the man who has only been flying a few times.

4. Yes. The Diggins School is very good, but to become a pilot good enough to obtain a commercial position you would have to spend a young fortune.

5. The above mentioned magazines, given in No. 3. These can be obtained at almost any news stand, or you can get them at reduced rates by being a member of the National Aeronautic Association.

I do not like to throw cold water on your ambition to become an airplane pilot, but I do want to keep you from spending a lot of money on training, etc., when I am absolutely sure that you would not make a penny from it after the average four-hundred-minute course given by most aviation schools. Of course you might be one of the exceptions, the man who learns to fly in that time, but even if you were it would be mighty hard to get any paying position with a reliable commercial flying company.

However, there is a way you can get a mighty fine flying training, one that will turn you out a first-class pilot with over a thousand hours' time in the air to your credit, and what is more a high-class airplane mechanic—a man who can overhaul a motor, rig a plane, handle wireless and the thousand and one little jobs that a high-grade commercial airplane pilot must know.

You can enlist as a cadet in the United States Air Service if you can pass the required mental and physical examinations, and you will receive about a year's training under the very best instructors in the Army Air Service and at the same time you will receive pay and allowances amounting to a little over one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. For further information about this training ask the nearest Army recruiting officer.

Hope I have been able to do you a service and that you have many "happy landings" as we used to say in France.

Quichua Runners

THIS letter and answer came in a long time ago, but it's just as interesting now as ever. As to whether a runner can average twelve and three-eighths miles an hour for twenty-four hours straight with no allowance for any halts—Well, it's a wonderful world, and I've reached the age at which I abstain from denying that anything might happen:

Question.—"I would like to ask you a question about one of your stories that was published in the *Adventure* magazine. The story in question was printed in the Aug. 3rd number, 1920, and in it you made the statement that an Indian ran two hundred and ninety-seven miles in twenty-four

hours. The title of the story is "The Master Plotter." I hope I have not misinterpreted the meaning of the paragraph, and if not, I wonder that some member of Camp-Fire has not spoken before this. If you would send me some information about the endurance and running qualities of the Indians of South America, or of those of the section in which you are in charge, I would appreciate it very much. I am sending you the paragraph in question attached below, so as to avoid any confusion, exactly as printed in the magazine:

An Indian runner, a Quichua slave, running the entire distance along the track from Quito to Duran, an incredible distance of two hundred and ninety-seven miles in twenty-four hours, reported that the former president and seven of his head generals had been captured and burned alive in one of the main squares of Quito, the capital of the republic, by a mob of men and women that the Federal soldiers claimed they were unable to hold in check when they brought in the prisoners. This ended the revolution to regain power for the former president.

I am enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelop for reply, if you feel this is worthy of an answer. Though primarily not intended for any one but yourself, if Mr. Hoffman could use this, please withhold my name."—C. F. W., Louisiana, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Young.—The run along the railroad track (297 miles) from Quito to Duran was made by an Indian during the revolution of ex-President Alfaro against General Plaza. Alfaro was later captured and together with seven of his generals was torn to pieces, partly eaten by the mob and burned in one of the principal squares of Quito. I arrived there at about this juncture. The run was being commented upon by natives and foreigners, and so far as I could learn there was no doubt about its having been performed.

When the Spaniards first came to the highlands of South America they found many strange things being done by the couple of million inhabitants who lived all the way from what is now Ecuador to the northern part of Chile. These people smelted copper, wove cloth, built houses of heavy masonry, embalmed dead bodies and used gold for household cooking, eating and drinking vessels. This last was their undoing, for while they put a value on gold only as something to use like any other metal, the Spaniards prized it as we do and went crazy over it.

These people had a large sheep they used for packing; but it was too small for a riding-animal and not very swift, so all the swift errands were performed by runners. It is said that the Inca king each day ate fresh fish caught from the sea and hurried to him by relays of fast runners. Incredible records were made by these men, who had been trained from birth, almost, to run. The high altitude develops huge lung-power after generations have been bred in it, but for you and me it makes for short-windedness. But the people who are born and brought up in the rarefied air are short and stocky and with very large lungs. I remarked upon this the first time I came among them. They

lived in a country ranging from ten to fourteen thousand feet high with mountains running up at intervals to over 22,000 feet.

All were—and are yet—inveterate users of coca. This is leaves from the tree of the plant from which cocain is extracted. For long feats of endurance they took a small package of these leaves and constantly kept a wad of them in their mouths wrapped around a small bit of unslaked lime to free the cocain and other alkaloids contained in the coca-leaves. One American doctor who investigated the subject and wrote a large book on it and a famous American writer (Dr. Mozans) claim that cocain used in this fashion appears to free great reserves of strength and is not attended with the pernicious results following use of the drug cocain, which has not the balancing chemicals found in the entire leaf. Be that as it may, the Indian runners and packers used and still use this leaf when on their long jaunts.

Packers have made records that are just as incredible. Mr. Veatch in his book "From Quito to Bogota" speaks of a record made by a packer. I forget the miles and the weight of the load, but it was a stupendous feat of endurance. I also think you will find by consulting the records that the run made from Cajamarca when the Inca king was captured by Pizarro heads any similar feat in the world. Some writers claim this was a relay run; but even at that it was wonderfully swift.

The Inca race has perished. Hundreds of thousands of descendants of their former subjects (the Quichua Indians) remain. Now and again a fast runner is born, no doubt having the blood of the old-time couriers in his veins. Also, away from the railroads and telegraph, Indians are used for this very purpose today in retired parts of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and northern Chile.

The Indian who made the run from Quito to Guayaquil was employed—it was related to me—on account of a local record he possessed as a runner. Of course there is no way of absolutely proving it; but for my part, having seen Indian runners in several other countries—Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, etc.—and observing the superiority of the Quichuas over these I little doubt that this particular run was made in the time it was claimed.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Wolf-Hunting in Ontario

THE trouble is that the wolf always seems to see the hunter first:

Question:—"Can you give me any information re trapping, or more particularly shooting and killing of timber wolvies for profit in northwestern Ontario?"

I am a young man of twenty with some outdoor experience; have worked on farms and in lumber camps; am in good health and willing to tackle anything in reason that has money and adventure in it.

Where can I get in with an experienced trapper who would be willing to take me with him into camp and give me a few hints about trapping?

Please let me know what in your opinion would be the best part of Ontario to trap in. What does a trapper's outfit usually consist of? What caliber rifle would you recommend? Would a .303 Savage be all right?

What would my share of one outfit cost in case I went into the game with a partner on equal shares?

What would be the best time of year to look over a prospective trapping-ground, build camp, etc?

Kindly give any suggestions you have in mind as I am new at this bushwhacking, and a few hints are welcome."—ARTHUR H. NETZEL, Tisdale, Sask., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—I wouldn't advise any man to go in for wolf-hunting unless he would do so for the mere pleasure of being in the woods all the time. As a business proposition I would consider wolf-hunting a failure from the very beginning. Undoubtedly we have a number of wolves in this country, but they are so cunning they are a hard thing to get. An Indian told me he had been hunting and trapping for thirty years and during that time he got but one wolf.

As far as the adventure part of it is concerned I would like nothing better myself than to hook up with a good partner and go back up-country for a couple of months. I know where there are a few wolves. Two years ago I lay in bed one night and heard a pack run a deer along a ridge to a little lake. I saw their tracks several times in different places, but I never got my eyes on one in daylight.

As regards trapping. I couldn't find a partner for you. Why not put a little ad. in *Rod and Gun* Woodstock, Ont.?

The .303 Savage is good enough for anything in game we have in Ontario.

A trapper's outfit consists of so many things that it is impossible for me to enumerate them here. Your share might cost you anywhere from \$100 up. that is for food, traps, etc. The best time of the year to look over the ground is in early Fall, but I couldn't tell you where you would find a good location, for trappers are numerous and the good places are quickly picked up.

Your best plan is to advertise and thereby get in touch with some good man. Then you can arrange all the rest of the details.

Removal of Tattooing

TORTURE to get it on, more torture to get it off:

Question:—"I have tattooed marks on both of my forearms and would like to have them removed. Can you advise me as to any way or method used to accomplish the above? Or can you furnish me with a prescription of drugs or chemicals if such are used for the above end? State cost of same. I enclose self-addressed, stamped envelop."—A. J. KRASHOWITZ, Richwood, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—My advice to you would be, unless your tattoo marks are very objectionable indeed, to make up your mind to live with them in peace. The removal of such marks is painful as well as expensive. One method is to tattoo milk over the tattoo design with a set of bunched needles. This is not very satisfactory, as the result is apt to be blotchy and the tattooing may need two or three repetitions of the treatment before the skin is clear.

Another method involves the gradual eating-away of the epidermis with some acid preparation, the recipe of which I am not familiar with. Various

surgeons in the country will undertake the small operation—at a price.

Any clinic devoted to skin diseases ought to be able to help you.

I do not know of any such in your district. But Mr. Jack Briggs, who operates a tattooing concession in Coney Island, guarantees to remove old tattoo marks. Possibly some day you might be able to get in touch with him.

Minerals of the Philippines

GENERAL questions, such as the subjoined, don't have to be answered by the "A. A." man; and when he does so it is a special courtesy. See Rule 4, page 184:

Question:—"I am writing to you to get some information about surface features and mining; in the Philippines."—GEORGIA BARGSLEY, Eastland, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Connor:—"The islands for the most part are mountainous with many, many ranges and summits where a white man's foot has never trod. These ranges are covered with vast forests of valuable timber consisting of teak, redwood, mahogany and various other woods which find good markets in China and Japan. Again the surface may present to your eye an entire mountainside in step terraces under cultivation with rice. The forests are virgin and will afford timber output for nearly a hundred years to come, according to estimates made by experts.

The plains of the islands are given over to vegetables, tobacco, coconut, fruit and kindred produce that finds a consuming domestic market. To describe each island's features would require reams and reams of paper. Why not go to your public library and ask for Dean Worcester's book on the Philippines? You can have weeks of very entertaining reading, and it is illustrated also.

Mining is not developed to any great extent in the islands. Gold, copper, manganese, iron, silver and petroleum have been found in paying quantities, but like all other new-found fields they need great financial backing to develop it to industrial proportions. Cement and asphalt have also been found.

Costumes of Germany

QUITE a number, for a country no bigger than the State this inquirer writes from:

Question:—"I would like to find out some information on the costumes of Germany, in all parts of the nation."—ROBERT FERRELL, Eastland, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. F. Fleischer:—"In the cities people wear very much the same clothing as we do only of a little out-of-date and baggy cut. In the country the peasants are wearing very elaborate dresses on Sundays, although during their working weeks they go around in the usual garb of drab sacks.

I know that there are more than one hundred and fifty different peasant costumes in Germany, and you can see for yourself that I can not give you a list in a letter.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the *Montreal Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

AKERS, RALPH P. Was with the United Fruit Co. in Guatemala in 1918. Age forty years last August. Home is in Atlanta, Ga. Supposed to be somewhere in Cuba. Write to your old partner, whose birthplace, birthday, and age are the same as yours.—Address BROOKS care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MCCOY, W. C. Last heard from while a seaman on the battleship *New Jersey*, on cruise around the world, 1907. Reported in Marine Corps during World War Seen in France in 1918. Any information will be appreciated by his old gunnery officer.—Address W. R. BOWDOIN, Captain U. S. Navy, 1624 Sewickley Terrace, Pittsburgh, Pa.

A COMPLETE list of unclaimed mail will be published in December 30th and June 30th issues of *Adventure*.

FULTON, FRANK. Was in Auckland, Australia in 1808. Age nineteen years at that time. Letter received saying that he intended to return to California. His parents were residents of San Luis, Obispo Co., Calif. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. MAUDE T. KING, Tonopah, Nevada.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February 20th issue all un-found names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

ARTHUR, D. F., JR. Age twenty-five. Light complexion, six feet. Was in College, Texas, last April Letters sent to Wolsenberg, Colo., returned marked unclaimed. Any information will be appreciated by his father.—Address D. F. ARTHUR, Box 35, Okahumpka, Fla.

BURDICK, L. H. Affairs satisfactorily arranged. Please write.—Address E. H. B., 89 N. Center St., Perry, New York.

MANLOVE FAMILY. Last heard from at 442 Gerrard St., E. Toronto, Can. in 1914 and 1915. Any information will be appreciated.—Address G. ARTHUR MEEK, Gen. Del., Tucson, Arizona.

URLING, FRED. Your mother and I are grieved. You will always be welcomed. Please write your old pal.—Address Dad.

LUSK, JOHN. Resident of Mississippi. Were together on the Battleship Michigan. He left me at Chesapeake Bay some time in October, 1918. Any information will be appreciated by his old pal.—Address ROY QUAKENBUSH, Swepsonville, N. C.

BRANSON, HOSEA L. (Billy) Last heard of in North Platte, Nebraska and Omaha, Nebraska. Roomed at the Ilar Grand Hotel in 1918. Height about five feet, five inches, dark brown hair, brown eyes, weighed about one hundred forty pounds, wore high heel on left shoe on account of broken leg. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address JESSE E. BRANSON, 1106 Main St., Atkins, Ark.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SPIES, CHAS. W. Last seen a soldier at San Pedro, Calif., in 1917. Write.—Address JOHN DAVIES, care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Jan. 20, 1924 or Feb. 10, 1924 issues of *Adventure*. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ALLAN, ALBERT VICTOR: Bassett, George; Buffett, Captain James; Chisolm, Robert; Crews, Herman R.; Davis, Lester; Fessenden, Robert; Gerrard, A. C.; Gistason, Jacob; Goss, Willie; Hagen, August; Harding, Samuel Merton or A. C. Ardell; Hart, Henry S.; Hillerby, Robert J.; Hogan, R. M.; Holloway, Edmer M.; Jennings, Joe; Kubik, Charles J.; Lambert, Edwin; Leider, Joseph; LeRouge, Harry; Loomis, Albert B.; Loper, Fred; Lovett, William Norman; Mattson, John H.; Otterson, Thomas James; Paxton, Christer H.; Raymond, Fred; Richards, Charles; Sidel, Al; Southwick, Alfred Whales; Sowden, Francis; Stafford, George; Stassi, John; Vincent, Ted; Vitie, Alexander M.; Wilson, George; Wolff, Chris.

MISCELLANEOUS—Buck; Hughie; E. N. T. G.; Zipperien family; J. W. H. Jack.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 10TH ISSUE

Besides the three complete novelettes mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:



THE MAN WHO SPOKE WITH THE WIND*

It was the trader or the natives.

J. Allan Dunn

BATTLING BUTCH GETS HIS

A shanghai party conducted along generous lines.

Gordon Young

PORTO BELLO GOLD A Five-Part Story Part IV

The fight with Pew and Long John Silver.

Arthur D. Howden Smith

ELIJAH AND THE KANGAROO WALLOP

Flying fists, a plot—and a question of ethics.

John T. Rowland

FOREIGN PARTS

"Hands up!" Eastern and Western fashion.

Royce Brier

OUT OF THE EAST

Blank cartridges to kill a ghost.

Georges Surdez

*An "Off-the-Trail" story. See footnote at bottom of first contents page.

Still Farther Ahead

IN THE three issues following the next there will be long stories by Leonard H. Nason, W. C. Tuttle, Frederick J. Jackson, Arthur O. Friel, Gordon Young, L. Patrick Greene, Kingsley Moses, Arthur D. Howden Smith, George Brydges Rodney, J. D. Newsom and Barry Scobee; and short stories by Raymond S. Spears, F. St. Mars, Sidney Herschel Small, Geo. E. Holt, John Webb, Michael J. Phillips, J. Allan Dunn, John T. Rowland, Royce Brier, Georges Surdez and others—stories of the West, the South Seas, the War, the Amazon, Africa, Japan, the sea, the desert, the jungle, cowboys, pirates, soldiers, sailors, Indians—of adventurers the world around.

Reduce your cost of living



SINCE
1847

HALF of your living expenses, during many months of the year, are for vegetables which you could easily grow in your own garden. Even without considering the advantage of fresh, crisp vegetables, the actual saving should give you sufficient reason for planting a garden this year—with latter-day methods and higher quality of seeds a space 25 x 50 feet should produce all the vegetables that a family of six will require.

One of our customers writes us:

"I have never done any work in the garden, but I found that the Garden Guide and Record you sent me with my order for seeds made it plain and easy. Our family had more vegetables all summer than we could use and the actual expense was under five dollars."

To get the full results of your garden, you should plant the best seeds obtainable. 77 years of successful seed growing and testing make Henderson's seeds the very best you can buy.

"Everything for the Garden"

is the title of our annual catalogue. It is really a book of 176 pages, handsomely bound with a beautifully embossed cover, 16 colored plates and over 1000 halftones, direct from photographs, showing actual results without exaggeration. It is a library of everything worth while, either in farm, garden or home.

REMARKABLE OFFER

of **Henderson's Seed Specialties**

To demonstrate the superiority of Henderson's Tested Seeds, we have made up a Henderson Collection, consisting of one packet each of the following six great specialties: **Ponderosa Tomato, Big Boston Lettuce, White-Tipped Scarlet Radish, Henderson's Invincible Asters, Brilliant Mixture Poppies, Giant Waved Spencer Sweet Peas.**

In order to obtain the largest possible distribution for our annual catalogue, "Everything for the Garden," we make the following unusual offer: Mail us 10c and we will send you the catalogue, together with this remarkable "Henderson's Specialty Collection" and complete cultural directions. **Every Empty Envelope Counts as Cash.** This collection is enclosed in a coupon envelope which, when emptied and returned, will be accepted as 25c cash payment on any order of seeds, plants, or bulbs amounting to one dollar or over.

Peter Henderson & Co.

35-37 Cortlandt Street

New York City

PETER HENDERSON & CO.

35-37 Cortlandt Street, New York City

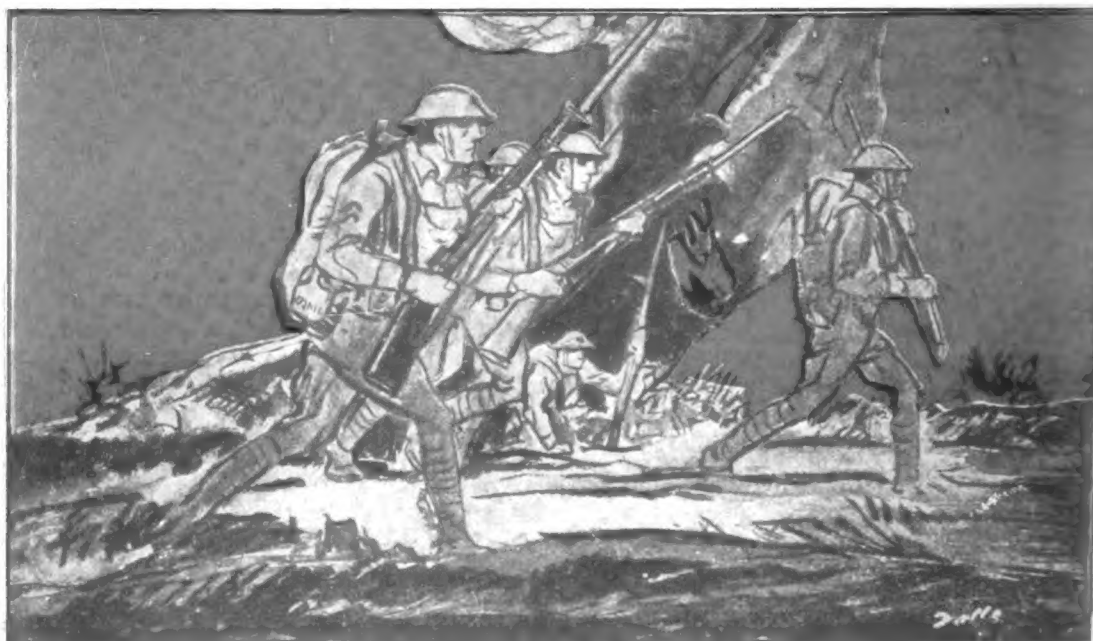
I enclose herewith 10c for which send catalogue and "Henderson's Specialty Collection," with complete cultural directions, as advertised in ADVENTURE.

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Will There Be Another Great War in 30 Years?

WILL the wealth of the United States tempt unscrupulous countries? E. Phillips Oppenheim, the famous novelist, has written a tremendous novel appearing in *EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE* on the subject of International politics in the year 1950. He pictures an International Congress in which all is apparently serene,

but beneath which there is a constant undercurrent of intrigue and plotting. Will *Grant Slattery*, the American Secret Service man, fall in love again with his old sweetheart, who had jilted him to marry a German nobleman? Why does she try to win him back—for love or for some sinister purpose?

Every one will enjoy reading "The Wrath to Come," by E. Phillips Oppenheim, starting in the February

Everybody's
Magazine

First in Fiction

On Every News-stand